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KATHERINE S. MACQUOID (*Good d. n.*)

AUTHOR OF

"ELIZABETH MORLEY," "MISS EYON OF EYON COURT," ETC.

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B E R R I S .

Part I.

CHAPTER I.

A SUMMONS.

It was easy to see that the owners of the poor room had done their best to improve its appearance. I should have said inhabitants rather than owners, for the square, shabbily furnished room made the half of a floor let to two sisters who at this moment were sitting at the large centre-table, each holding an account-book, and each striving to add up long columns of figures. One of these sisters was between twenty-five and thirty, a comely, gentle-looking woman on whose face it was easy to read lessons taught by sorrow, although now, as she looked up at her beautiful young sister, a bright smile spread over her face and showed that it was much younger than it had looked in repose.

“You poor dear Berris,” she said affectionately,

"don't bother yourself over those figures—I'll work it out; and look here, if the worst comes to the worst, I need not go to the flower-show, and then I can do without a new frock."

Berris raised her brilliant blue eyes from the row of figures which she had just for the fourth time added; her lovely color had deepened with vexation, and she had pushed her bright auburn hair into a tangle above her eyes.

"I am not sure that you will make it out, Molly," she said wearily. "I have added it four times, and each time the figures come different. Oh! what a stupid, tiresome thing arithmetic is! I fancy rich girls never bother themselves with accounts; why should they? They have always enough and to spare, when a new frock is wanted. Ah!" she ended, in a disgusted tone, "it is so pitiful to be poor."

Berris flung her account-book on the table, and began to walk up and down the room. While she listened to her sister, she looked sadly at the much-worn carpet and then at the faded red curtains; they made a strong contrast to her tall, graceful figure and her lovely, refined face.

"You forget one thing, dear: we have been always poor—all our lives; we may seem poorer now, but remember we are getting free from debt. When you are a few years older, perhaps you will be able to earn a little for yourself, and so be able to dress better."

Berris stopped short in the middle of the room;

she made a low and very graceful courtesy and her beautiful lips parted in a merry laugh.

"You are such a dear old frump, Molly darling! You really think because you are so good, better than anybody I ever heard of, that I am going to follow suit. To begin with, it would be monotonous to be alike, and certainly when I see how long it takes you to earn five shillings at copying those dreary manuscripts, I don't feel the slightest wish to imitate you."

Molly's dark brown head had suddenly bent low over her account-book. She knew that Berris did not mean all she said. Molly shrank from the idea of persuading the lovely young girl to do anything she disliked, yet the scorn of her sister's voice had struck Molly, and now she tried to concentrate thought, as she asked herself whether it would not be wiser, and kinder too, to help Berris to be less unreal.

"Look here," Berris said suddenly; "how much may I have to spend on a frock? and can I have it made by Miss Morant?"

A momentary disturbance showed on Molly's pleasant face, but it was followed by a smile as she dotted down a few figures, and added them together. After all, why should she grudge the expense of Miss Morant's bill?—she must save the extra money the best way she could, and it would be a satisfaction for once to see Berris' figure done justice to. So she gave her consent very pleasantly, and named a sum for the gown which

satisfied the girl, for Berris bent down and kissed her sister.

"It will be like a dream," she said, "to feel not ashamed of one's clothes. I shall feel as Cinderella must have felt at the ball, and then when I come back to this dowdy room I suppose I shall wake up."

Molly looked tenderly at the bright, beautiful face. What her sister had said seemed an opening for the hint she felt impelled to give.

"But the ball was not Cinderella's life; I mean it was a rather unreal interlude."

"All the same it found her a husband and a fortune, Molly. Now please do not begin to preach; you cannot do it, dear. Leave all that sort of thing to Clara Gledhow; she, if you like, was born with a sermon in her mouth."

Molly did not answer; Berris stood looking at herself in the dull chimney-glass. She turned gayly round to Molly. "How do you know that I shall not find a husband at the flower-show? I have half a mind to bet upon it, but I cannot lay a wager worth winning, and, if I lost, I certainly should not pay you; no, there's no fun in betting against a sister. What should you say now, Molly, if I were to pick up an old husband at the flower-show—a rich one, of course, eh?"

Molly shook her head.

"Do not say that, Berris; to begin with, you would not marry any one you did not like, and I am sure you would not like any one much older."

"How do you know that?" Berris asked gravely. "Money can make old things seem new."

"You know what I mean," her sister answered. "I have seen you grow angry when such a marriage was hinted at."

"Oh!" Berris stretched up her arms and yawned, as if the memory which Molly had called up wearied her. "You mean mother's ideal husband. Well, if she had said less about his perfections, I should perhaps have been more willing, but then I have known Mr. Gledhow so very long, there is no novelty about him, and I fancy half the fun of being married is in its novelty; besides, there is Clara. Fancy being lectured by Clara, six days out of seven!"

"You would not have been happy with Mr. Gledhow," Molly said, "but I do not want you to marry, dear, unless you find some one exactly suited to you."

"'Just suited to my mind,'" Berris sang in her sweet, low voice, "only I'm afraid beggars can't be choosers. I suppose you think as mother did, that I am very difficult to live with?"

Molly looked disturbed, and her forehead, certainly one of the best features in her face, became delicately puckered at her sister's question.

"I cannot tell. I have only lived with you and mother, and of course I know your moods and your ways; perhaps a stranger might not find you as easy to live with as I do."

Berris frowned till her strongly marked eye-

brows seemed to touch; she bit her full, cherry-like under-lip. "I know mother often said so," Berris spoke sadly and thoughtfully; "but then even you, Molly, who never speak against people, must own that it was very difficult to live in peace with mother."

"Hush, dear! Mother had ill-health, and her life had been full of anxiety and disappointment. I believe it was because she saw that you were discontented with our way of living that she wished you to marry Mr. Gledhow."

"There is another excuse which you have forgotten to make for her, Molly. Poor dear mother knew nothing about happiness in marriage. Do not look shocked, Molly; I have kept the knowledge to myself, and I suppose you thought I was too small to notice; but I was six, remember, when father died, and I know I often heard quarrels; besides, mother never used to talk of him as other widows speak of their husbands. I have an idea that in some ways I am like mother, in temper for instance, and I dare say she thought that if I had plenty of money I should be sweeter-tempered and less discontented. Poor mother! I don't think she was ever quite contented, even with you."

"Hush!" Molly repeated hurriedly; "do not talk in that way, Berris, you know it is wrong."

The tall younger sister walked to the window, the long, sweeping lines of her figure showing to perfection as she moved. Molly sat still at the

table; her thoughts had wandered far away from the book of figures. She was six years older than Berris was, and she vividly remembered the constant dissension between her parents and the pain it had given her. But she turned from the remembrance with a tender sorrow that it should have been revived from the forgetfulness in which it had lain for years past, and she turned her thoughts to her beautiful unprotected young sister. She longed at that moment for some wise, sympathizing friend, with whom she could take counsel, but she knew scarcely any one in Northminster.

Mr. Bedale, the father of these girls, had been a manufacturer in Awlford till he suddenly failed in business, and was left almost without resources. He was very amiable and also very weak, and certainly he had little business faculty. Besides this, his wife had persuaded him into a more expensive style of living than he could really afford, and although she had instigated these expenses, she could not forgive her husband for having yielded to her wishes, when she learned that he was a bankrupt. There was a good deal of truth in the complaints which she showered on the unhappy man, when she declared that if he had shown the same earnest interest and energy in prosecuting his own business that he had lavished in helping on the designs and speculations of others, she should still have a comfortable home. She felt misfortune the more keenly, because she had brought her hus-

band a little money, and as this had not been duly settled on her, it had gone in the general wreck.

People said it must have been a relief to Mrs. Bedale when her husband died. Perhaps it was for her, for she had never really loved him, so that there had been no store of garnered-up affection to fall back on in time of adversity; but without doubt the poor wearied man must have longed for freedom from the constant reproaches and daily bickering of his life. His children deeply mourned his loss; he had been a most indulgent and loving father, and as Berris grew older she felt his loss yet more deeply, for, with the strange perversity which seems to make it necessary for some people always to have a scapegoat on whom to pour out their ill-humors, Mrs. Bedale, who had formerly been so proud of her beautiful child, now never lost an opportunity of snubbing the girl's vanity, and it must be owned that, from the time she was fourteen, Berris had made the opportunities frequent. Since her mother's death she had become better-tempered, but more resentful of that which she called Molly's pinching and screwing.

Molly had been alarmed at the bills sent in to her after her mother's death, and she had determined that she and her sister would, when they were paid, keep closely within the limits of their meagre income. They had just a hundred a year, and she knew that some of this was a pure gift from their guardian, Mrs. Gledhow. Molly had nearly managed to pay her mother's debts, and

she hoped in future that Berris would be more contented.

She was suddenly startled from her reverie.

"Here's the postman, Molly," her sister exclaimed, "and he looked up at our window. I believe there is actually a letter for us."

She clapped her hands with joy as she heard the postman's knock below. She hurried to the door and half-way downstairs met the maid, who, being busy cleaning, was carrying the letter, a corner of her apron between it and her grimy thumb and finger. Berris was vexed that she had betrayed her excitement, and she took the letter with calm dignity.

The maid laughed when she was out of sight.

"Poor soul," she said, "she's as eager for it as if 'twas full of coin. I'm sure I hope it is. They two lived on that bit of salt beef for near a week. As to the eldest one, she's a regular skinflint."

Berris put the letter on the table. Her eyes sparkled and looked a darker blue than ever, while the lovely color on her cheeks had deepened till it brought into vivid relief the delicate cream-tint of her temples and her dainty little ears. She clasped her soft hands together by way of keeping in her impatience while Molly examined the postmark. "It comes from Frodsham," the elder sister said slowly; "that is where mother's cousin lives. He never came to see us, but I have heard her speak of him. I wonder——"

Molly checked herself, turned a little pale, and

began to open her letter. She read it through, and she was beginning to read it again, for it was very short, when a stamp on the floor beside her warned her of her sister's impatience.

Molly smiled and looked up at the frowning face.

"I beg your pardon, dear, but I was so surprised; read for yourself."

The letter was from the lawyer of their mother's cousin. It announced the death of Mr. Aysgarth, and invited the two Miss Bedales to be present at the reading of his will, which was to take place the following Thursday. Two bank-notes for ten pounds each were enclosed for mourning and travelling expenses.

Molly's eyes were fixed on Berris, and she saw that the girl looked dazed, almost frightened, and that the rush of rich color had faded out of her face.

"Do you think, Molly," she spoke in a hushed voice, "that Mr. Aysgarth has left us his money?"

"No," Molly spoke quickly, "it is not likely, and it would be most unjust. Mr. Aysgarth has a married daughter and grandchildren, and though she married against his will he would not, I should think, take away what she had a right to expect from him. Dear mother used to say that he was hard but just."

Berris shook her head.

"Do not be a humbug, Molly. You only say that because you want to keep me quiet, but you know

as well as I do that we are going to be well off. Oh, I am so glad, you dear old thing!" She gave her sister a vehement hug, and then walked up and down the room talking as fast as she could.

"There's one bother in it, though," she suddenly stopped short—"I cannot have the lovely blue frock I had been planning, and I cannot appear at the flower-show in brand-new mourning, either. Well, never mind; I'm off to Miss Morant to order myself a mourning costume regardless of expense. How surprised she will be!"

CHAPTER II.

MR. AYSGARTH'S WILL.

THE sisters found a dog-cart waiting for them at the station, and they soon reached the gray manor-house, gray as the fells which bordered the dale along which they had been driving. The weather was bleak with an icy touch that seemed wholly out of place in April, and the sky was shrouded by a gray cloak that added to the gloom and depression of the atmosphere.

Molly and her sister were at once shown into a low, dingy-looking room, made still more gloomy by its dark oak-panelled walls unrelieved by pictures or ornaments of any sort. Molly felt the cold keenly, the more perhaps because she was nervous about the meeting that lay before them. She was thinking of this as she bent over the blazing wood-fire to warm her chilled hands.

Berris stood upright in the centre of the room; that is, as much in the centre as was permitted by a long, dull mahogany dining-table, and she took an inquisitive survey of everything in the dowdy, dusty room. She was mentally refurnishing it, hanging the walls with old engravings and modern etchings; placing in one corner a tall clock-

case, of which she had caught a glimpse as she entered, and lightening up the dark panels on each side of the old buffet with plaques and pans of repoussé brass. She had some taste, and she also possessed that power of organization which seems to come to some people ready-made; they do not need to place a chair here or a table there to try the effect thus produced—they have already seen it mentally, and can arrange the picture they have created without any apparent effort. Berris felt convinced that the old manor-house would in future belong to her and to her sister, and although its gloom and its out-of-the-way situation disturbed her, she thought all that might be greatly improved when she was at the head of affairs. It must be owned that, though Berris was addicted to long reveries, they did not cover many subjects: her own increasing beauty, and the way in which she might add to it by a better style of dress and by various toilet requisites which she read about in the daily paper lent them by their guardian, and, next to this engrossing subject, the longing for money to carry out her schemes and for worldly distinction. She would have been satisfied if she had known the radiant picture she made standing in the midst of her dowdy, dismal surroundings, like some lovely plume of ixia blossom above the dark mould at its base.

The door opened, and as she stood facing it she had a full view of the person who came in. It was Mr. Statham, the lawyer who had written to

Molly to request their presence at the manor-house. He had come in with hospitable intentions toward the two girls, thinking they would be chilled by their drive; but his intentions were for the moment forgotten and his self-possession fled at the sight of this beautiful, distinguished-looking woman. The lines of her figure were so perfect, and she was already so rounded in outline, that Miss Morant had taken pleasure in setting off her new customer to the best advantage, especially as Berris had taken care to tell her the occasion for which the frocks were wanted. The black, drooping hat did not hide her regular features, and the sombre dress suited her fair skin.

John Statham was bewildered; he had not even dreamed of so beautiful a creature, and to find her here in a way his own guest completely dazzled him out of his usual legal precision on such an occasion.

Molly came forward when she saw him, and he awaked from his brief hallucination. Her sweet, quiet face recalled him to his position and its duties.

He bowed to Molly and then to her sister. "I wrote to you, Miss Bedale," he said; "my name is Statham. You will have something to eat, will you not, before you join the others in the library? We shall not lunch till after the reading of the will."

Molly turned to her sister. She was accustomed to let Berris decide a question of this sort.

"No, thank you"—the younger girl looked hard

at the solicitor and thought what a clever face he had—"we are not hungry; but are you really Mr. Aysgarth's lawyer?"

"My sister means," Molly said, "that you look so much younger than we had expected to find you. I thought I was answering the letter of an old gentleman."

Mr. Statham smiled. "You do not remember me, I see. I saw you about nine years ago, Miss Bedale; before you left school I went over to Northminster to see your school-mistress, and I brought back an account of your progress which delighted Mr. Aysgarth, and decided him to take the same interest in your sister that he had taken in you. You never saw Mr. Aysgarth, I fancy, but he felt greatly interested in you; he showed me a photograph of you not long before he died. I wish he had seen you, you and your sister too."

Mr. Statham glanced toward Berris, and the girl felt troubled at the tone of regret which her quick ears had detected in his voice.

"I remember you now," Molly said slowly. "It was very kind of Mr. Aysgarth to take so much interest in us."

Mr. Statham looked pleased. He went forward and rang the bell, and told the maid who answered it to show the ladies to a bedroom and help them to remove their wraps.

"I will meet you," Mr. Statham said, "and introduce you to your cousins."

When they reached the bedroom, Berris scarcely

waited for the maid to leave her and Molly together.

"Is he not charming?" she said to her sister; "so good-looking, too."

"He looks good, but I do not think he is handsome."

"Ah, that is possible," Berris answered, looking at herself in the glass. Molly was wondering over the unexpected revelation which Mr. Statham had given her as to her schooling and her sister's. She had often wondered how her mother had been able to send them, one after the other, to so good a school, and now she learned that they owed this part of their education to the unknown cousin for whom they had not been even taught to pray. She soothed the trouble this thought gave her by telling herself that Mr. Aysgarth had no doubt enjoined secrecy on her mother, but Berris was too impatient to give her sister much time for thought.

"Come, Molly," she said, "we must not keep him waiting."

Mr. Statham heard them coming, and he opened the library door. His studiously calm manner entirely masked his feelings, but he was just as impatient as the girl was; he wanted to feast his eyes again on the lovely face that still seemed to him more like a vision than reality.

He turned at once to a lady who sat facing the door with a sickly-looking, snub-nosed boy on one side of her, and on the other was a rosy, red-haired girl. The lady was tall and bony; she had a sin-

gularly short face, large, rather sleepy blue eyes with downcast lids, a pale, well-preserved complexion, over which a delicate tinge of color rose as the sisters came into the room.

"Mrs. Harrow, these are your cousins, Miss Bedale and Miss Berris Bedale." Mrs. Harrow bent her head with formal politeness, but she did not offer to shake hands. The boy and girl stared aggressively at the new-comers.

Mr. Harrow, a prematurely aged man of sixty, sat in an easy-chair beside the fire without so much as turning his head.

Mr. Statham looked at Molly and pointed to two chairs near him; then, when the sisters were seated, he began to read the will. He was shocked by Mrs. Harrow's behavior to these poor cousins, but he understood human nature well enough to be aware that the being suddenly raised from beggary to comparative wealth is often a heart-hardening experience, one which does not strengthen sympathy for those still in poverty.

There were a good many small legacies, first to old servants, then to hospitals, both in London and in Northminster; and as the reading proceeded Mrs. Harrow's large-knuckled hands moved restlessly in her lap. A deep snore from the chair beside the fire drew her eyes in that direction; her face remained immovable, but her shoulders were slightly shrugged, with what Berris thought was a movement of contempt for the sleeping husband. As the thought came to the girl, Mrs. Harrow

raised her eyes and met the searching glance of those deep, sapphire-like eyes. She looked away; it seemed to her that this beautiful, insolent creature was enjoying her vexation. She wondered how those girls came to be present, so well dressed too, quite out of keeping with their circumstances, for every one knew they scarcely had a penny-piece between them. She looked sharply at Mr. Statham; she began to suspect that the handsome Bedale girl had bewitched him.

For an instant, Mrs. Harrow wondered whether her father had been unduly influenced in favor of these poor cousins, and then, as she recalled his stern sense of justice, she felt ashamed of her suspicion. She had a dim remembrance that in his younger days she had heard that her father had been indebted to his uncle, Mrs. Bedale's father; but even this remembrance failed to quiet Mrs. Harrow's uneasiness. Her thoughts had wandered from the fixed tension with which she had at first listened to the reading, and now, as she suddenly heard the name Bedale, her eyes brightened and seemed smaller as she darted them at the unconscious Molly, who listened in incredulous wonder to the mention of her legacy.

Then came the turn of Berris; she listened in stoical silence, although every nerve quivered with excitement as she heard that she and her sister were left stock, free of all legacy duty, to the amount of one hundred pounds a year each during their lives only; after their respective deaths, this

money was to revert to the children of the testator's daughter. Mrs. Harrow felt very angry, but she controlled any show of vexation while she listened to the testator's statement that he made this bequest as a token of gratitude for a great service rendered him by his uncle, the grandfather of Mary and Berris Bedale. Then came the end, willing all the property, both real and personal, to his grandchildren, Hugh and Agnes Harrow, in the hands of trustees, of whom John Statham was named as one. A certain sum was to be paid for the education of these children, which was not to take place under their parents' roof. The only mention made of his daughter was that he bequeathed to her his gold watch and the family Bible—and in a codicil, bearing a later date than the body of the will, two hundred pounds a year, to be spent entirely on herself.

Mr. Harrow was awake now and was sitting upright in his chair.

"The old villain!" he exclaimed. "I'll—I'll fight that will, Mr. What-d'ye-call-yourself."

Statham turned round and looked at him coolly. He knew that Algernon Harrow, a broken-down ex-navy lieutenant, was rarely sober.

"There are at least a dozen witnesses who can be called to prove that Mr. Aysgarth was in perfect possession of all his faculties when he signed this will; he was especially anxious that no question should be raised on the point, and he took his measures accordingly," the lawyer said.

Before Mr. Harrow could answer, his wife had crossed the room and stood beside him. She said something in a low voice which seemed to quiet him. Mr. Statham replaced the will in the cover from which he had taken it, and then went and opened the door so that Molly and her sister might pass out. He followed them into the dingy dining-room.

"I had ordered luncheon to be served in the drawing-room," he said, "but I think you will be more comfortable in here by yourselves. I may have a little trouble with Mr. Harrow."

Molly looked gratefully at him.

"I do not know how to thank you for all your kindness," she said. "Shall we see you again before we go?"

"I hardly know—" he hesitated, "but I should much like to see you again;" he spoke to Molly, but, as he ended, his eyes rested on her sister's face. Berris held out her hand, and as he took it she said, with a glance that she knew was bewitching: "Do come and see us, Mr. Statham, when you are next in Northminster. We live at No. 17 Mary Street, and shall be very glad to see you."

"You are very kind"—he would have liked to keep the slender, soft hand in his, but he dared not. "It will be a very great pleasure to me to call."

There was no excuse for lingering, and he went, when he had asked them to order their carriage as soon as they were ready for it.

Berris ate her lunch in silence. She had usually

a good appetite, but to-day she did not feel hungry; she had so much to think over.

Molly, too, was glad to be silent. She was not as strong as her vigorous young sister was, and the early journey, and all that had happened since, had made her feel exhausted.

But when they reached home Berris spoke out, and showed that she was very angry.

"I call it horribly mean of Mr. Aysgarth to put us to all that expense, and make us go into mourning when we wanted to have colored frocks, just for a miserable sum like that. I felt sure we were to have the old house, and now it is to be sold for the benefit of that miserable boy and girl who will have this money that ought to have been ours."

Molly looked aghast.

"My dear Berris, I thought you would be as glad and thankful as I am. Only think what this legacy means to us! It seems too good to be true that we shall be able to live comfortably without fear of debt. We can even put a little away, in case of illness."

"Do not be absurd, Molly. You know I hate debt as much as you do, but fancy any one being able to save out of such an income! If you want to talk of something pleasant, talk of Mr. Statham; *that* will help to take the taste of our loss out of my mouth. One does not often see a man like that."

Molly was busy putting away the new dresses, and she did not answer. She had lived a shut-up

life for so long, for her mother had been ill for months before she died, that her propriety had been slightly alarmed by her sister's gushing invitation to Mr. Statham; he had certainly been very kind to them, but the prudent elder sister thought she should have preferred to consult their guardian, Mr. Gledhow, before they invited so young a man to come and see them.

"Why are you so dumb?" Berris spoke sharply. "I can tell you I feel cross enough, when I think of that cat-faced woman—you should have seen her eyes when your name was read; perhaps you did—she looked horrid. I prefer to think of my new admirer."

"Berris, how can you say that of Mr. Statham?"

"You are wiser than I am about some things," Berris said, "but you will allow that I am the best judge of how a man looks at me. Now, Molly, don't be disgusted—you will be an old maid if you do not mind; it is better that you should know that I have several admirers."

She paused, but Molly waited silently for her to explain herself.

"There is Major Darlington; I have never spoken to him, but you should just see how he looks at me when I meet him. So does Captain Forbes. Then, at the Cathedral, there is the new minor canon and several of the choristers; and there are plenty of shopmen in the town, only I look so haughty when shopmen stare, that they have to look away. I tell you this just to show you that I

am accustomed to admiration, and therefore I understood Mr. Statham's."

Molly spoke almost sternly:

"You know how I dislike this kind of talk, Berris. You are very handsome; I wish you were less conscious of your looks. I am sure that it is wrong to seek for admiration, or to think about it more than you can help."

Berris shrugged her shoulders and stood thinking; at last she said slowly: "I do not think he is as well off as I want my husband to be, but I have taken a strong liking to Mr. Statham, and I have a feeling that he will ask me to be his wife."

Molly thought that the girl was trying to tease her, and she left the room without answering.

"He is far too sensible," Berris went on, "to make me an offer unless he can afford to keep a wife; and if he asks me—I am nearly sure he will—I shall accept him;" she turned quickly round, surprised by the prolonged silence. "Why, Molly has actually left me to talk to myself! How angry she was! I never thought that Molly had a temper."

Part II.

CHAPTER III.

AN INVITATION.

MOLLY'S temper had been sorely tried in the three weeks that followed the reading of the will. She had called next morning on Mr. Gledhow, but he was not in. The same day she received a note from him, congratulating her and Berris on their good fortune. Mr. Gledhow said that he had heard the news from Mr. Statham, of whom he had a very good opinion. He added that he was going to London for a fortnight with his daughter, in order that she might have the advice of a physician recommended by their own doctor.

Molly felt thrown on herself. Clara Gledhow was an invalid, too much self-absorbed to take real interest in the affairs of others; but Molly had both a tolerant and a clinging nature, and she looked up to Clara almost as if she had been her elder sister. It would have been a comfort to ask her advice about Berris.

Mr. Statham had already called twice. Molly was out on his first call, but Berris received him

and told her sister that he paid a nice long visit. He came again, and Molly was surprised to see how the intimacy between him and her sister had progressed. Before he left Berris offered to take him to see a view of the Cathedral, which he said was unknown to him. At this the elder sister looked severe. She hardly knew how to interfere, but she knew that she ought to protest.

"There is nothing very special about the view," she said; "it is in fact the same that you get from the railway; you could easily find it when you are in that part of Northminster." She looked gravely at Mr. Statham. Instinctively something told her that she should find help in him against her sister's thoughtlessness, and she was not disappointed.

He turned to Berris, thanked her for her kind offer, but said that he had already outstayed his time and should scarcely catch his train to Woolton. He gave his card to Molly, and begged her to write to him, if she had any business question to ask respecting the money, in the absence of Mr. Gledhow.

When he had left the house Berris was vehement in her anger. "You have treated me like a child before Mr. Statham," she said; "you seem to forget that I am twenty-one. I have a perfect right to guide myself. If you interfere again between me and Mr. Statham, I just tell you this, Molly—I'll go and live alone where I can do exactly as I please."

Molly was used to her sister's flashing eyes and

her violent words, but this threat alarmed her; she tried to reason with the angry girl, telling her that her good looks and her lack of natural protectors made caution very necessary to her in a gossiping country town; but Berris stood sullenly silent. This had happened a week ago, and she had not shown any token of softening.

This morning at breakfast, Berris seemed to have recovered herself. Her lovely blue eyes rested pleasantly on her sister's face, and she asked Molly what she was going to do with her day.

Molly was too grateful for the change to notice the strangeness of the question, for her days passed with very little change in them. When she had done the small amount of housekeeping and tidying that was necessary for their comfort, she set to work on the law copying supplied by her guardian. After the mid-day meal she sometimes worked at this for another hour while Berris renovated one of her old hats, and sometimes one of Molly's, or else she looked out of window. Formerly they had gone out together in the afternoon, either for a walk or to call on some of their few acquaintances, but lately Berris had chosen to go out in the morning, and had declared herself too tired to accompany Molly or to go with her to evening at the Cathedral.

"I thought of calling on Clara," Molly said. "I fancy they must have come back."

"You won't want me, then. I know you and Clara like to have your talk by yourselves."

Molly laughed. "Clara will have a great deal to tell, I expect."

"I feel restless," Berris said. "I am going to do what I thought I never could afford to do: I am going over to Thirsk to see our poor old nurse Ann Forster. It will be a sort of change. Please lend me a few shillings. I shall soon be able to pay you back."

Molly gave her the money. She was pleased that Berris should wish to go and see the old servant.

"I will come and meet you," she said, "if you will say about what time you will come back."

"You know what Ann used to be," Berris said carelessly; "she always had so many last words, and I do not suppose she has altered. I'll come home all right, but it is good of you all the same, Molly."

She gave a sweet, grateful look which gladdened Molly's heart; she thought Berris looked more beautiful than ever this morning. There was a subdued, almost timid manner about her which added, Molly thought, to her charm; the gentle-natured woman felt thankful that peace was restored. If she had followed her sister to the railway station, she would have remarked an increase of timidity in Berris, and one or two furtive glances behind her as the girl asked for a return ticket to Woolton. Berris had resolved to go and see Mr. Statham. She persuaded herself that, after Molly's interference, he would probably discontinue his visits. She did not choose to write to

him and set the matter straight. He would of course answer her letter, and there would be complications. Molly would know all about it, and would tell Clara Gledhow; the only way was to meet Mr. Statham face to face in Woolton. He need not know that she had come over on purpose to see him, but her manner would tell him she liked him. Her pride suffered a little, but the gratification of her own will was a far more potent motive than the sparing of her pride.

She went into the first shop she came to in Woolton, and asked for Mr. Statham's office. It was farther from the station than she had fancied it would be, but she decided that this was better—it would give her more chance of meeting him. Berris had not counted on the observation she was likely to excite. It was mid-day when she reached the populous city, so much more bustling and thronged than quiet, old-fashioned Northminster, and the main street, in which she was, was filled with business men of all ages going out to their mid-day dinner or luncheon. At first Berris enjoyed the admiring glances she met, glances in which admiration only formed part of an absorbing curiosity as to her name, and the cause of her presence at that time of day in so thronged a thoroughfare. She became at last confused as she felt the warm blood rush to her face, conscious that she was altogether too remarkable to be wandering about alone; she shrank from meeting Mr. Statham in this flustered, frightened state, and

she turned down the first side street she came to, with a feeling of intense relief.

"Too much of a thing is good for nothing," she said to herself. "I did not think men could stare so rudely. Molly was right, after all, when she said I ought not to go about in strange places alone."

The street into which she had turned seemed to lead out of the town instead of into it; at the end she saw a grove of trees, and upland country beyond. Her heart sank; she dared not venture back into that staring crowd. Already one old man had walked beside her, and another had spoken to her. She must get back to the railway, and give up the hope of seeing Mr. Statham. Perhaps it was as well, she thought; he was so quiet that perhaps, like Molly, he was extra proper, and would disapprove of her having made such a journey alone.

She saw that a little way on a turning opened on the right. This might, she thought, lead back into the town, and she determined to see where it would take her. Though she was indolent, Berris was adventurous, and now that she was free from annoyance, and that her cheeks had become cooler, she began to enjoy her expedition. The turning led her into a street of handsome houses; some of the doors bore brass plates with names of doctors and solicitors inscribed thereon. Berris wished she had noticed the name of the street as she turned into it; it might be Wharncliffe Street. Mr. Sta-

tham's office was in Wharncliffe Street. She looked before her; as if summoned by her will, Mr. Statham was coming up the street, and as she saw him he recognized her.

Berris longed to run away. She felt unaccountably shy; she was afraid that he might not be pleased, and she was conscious that she had placed herself in a false position. But the delight she saw in his face, and his eager, quickened steps, calmed her agitation; he loved her, he was sure of it, and if he loved her, she told herself, all she did would be right in his eyes. Mr. Statham valued himself on the possession of a controlled, self-contained manner which veiled his feelings. If he could have looked on and seen his own eager greeting, he would have been greatly disturbed at his self-betrayal; but he was so absorbed in this beautiful girl, in gazing at her and in listening to her pleasantly spoken words, that he forgot himself altogether.

"What a delightful meeting! Are you staying here?" he said.

"No; I came over this morning on business. I am going back now," she said, giving him a look which completed his infatuation; he was going to offer to walk to the station with her, and then he recollected himself; he could hardly be seen walking with this lovely girl in Woolton in the very middle of the day.

"I do not like you to go back alone," he said. "If you could wait till the five o'clock train I

would gladly see you safe back to Northminster." Berris felt piqued; she thought he ought to walk with her at once to the station.

"You are very kind"—she raised her round chin ever so little—"but I cannot wait; my sister would wonder what had become of me. I am very glad to have met you. Good-day."

She bowed and turned away so swiftly that he stood stupefied; he could not hurry after her and ask if she was vexed with him. He was well known to many dwellers in the street, his own office being at its farther end, and he was extremely careful of appearances; it did not occur to him to wonder why Miss Bedale should have turned back, when he had met her coming in a contrary direction. Mr. Statham felt singularly irritable and disinclined for work. He had a longing to take the next train to Northminster, and confess his love; but the town-clock struck a quarter-past one, and reminded him that, directly after lunch, he had an appointment to keep with the mayor of Woolton.

Berris hurried back to the station. She was too angry to notice her fellow-wayfarers, but these were few in number; the great body of the inhabitants of Woolton were engaged in satisfying hunger and thirst. She could not possibly mistake her way to the station, and she reached it just in time to catch a train bound for Northminster. The rapid movement soothed her, but she was deeply mortified; she had fancied the power of her beauty

irresistible. It seemed to her that, if Mr. Statham really cared for her as much as she had fancied, he could not have suffered her to go away alone; he must have come to the station with her. She had lowered herself by seeking a man who did not deserve that she should waste a thought on him. But as she told herself all this, there rose up the picture of Mr. Statham's clever, thoughtful forehead, and of his wise, penetrating eyes, eyes in the depths of whose wisdom there lurked, at least the girl so fancied, a singular tenderness of feeling.

"It may only be compassion," she said in angry despair. The carriage in which she had placed herself was empty. There was no need to control her tears; they relieved her, and she had grown calm by the time she reached Northminster.

She was desperately hungry, for she had only had a bun since breakfast, and Molly would have finished dinner, and perhaps would have gone out, taking the keys in her pocket. Berris was never wanting in foresight when her own comfort was concerned. She bought a meat pie and a roll at the station buffet, and then went home.

She wondered how she could meet Molly's questions about her visit to Thirsk, and it was a relief to find that her sister was out; she determined to say that, as she had not found Ann in, she had returned by the next train. Berris blushed a little, and then she tossed her fair head with a look of conscious virtue.

"It will be true; I have not found Ann in, and

on such a fine day she would have been out, I am sure of it."

She grew tired of Molly's long absence; she wanted her tea. She sat at the window watching, till at last in sheer weariness she flung herself on the sofa and fell asleep.

Molly's entrance roused her, and Molly looked so bright and beaming that her sister's curiosity was excited.

"What has happened?" she exclaimed. "You have some good news, I can see it in your eyes, Molly. Tell me quick; I cannot wait."

"Well, dear, I think you will be pleased. I went to see Clara, and as I thought you would not be home, I stayed there."

"Go on," Berris said impatiently.

"Well"—Molly's smiles increased as she went on—"Lady Horsham was calling on Mr. Gledhow—you know he was Sir Joshua's agent years ago—and she came up to see Clara. She was so nice, so kind to everybody, and when I said good-by, she invited us to go and see her. She said she would write in a week or so, and fix an afternoon and send her carriage for us. Did you ever hear of anything so kind?"

Berris looked delighted.

"I am glad," she said, and her eyes glowed with triumph. "Ever since that time when Mr. Gledhow sent mother and me for a drive, and we passed by Edgerley, I made up my mind that one of these days I would go in at those park gates as a visitor."

Ah, Molly, perhaps you have not longed as I have to see the inside of a gentleman's house, and all the beautiful things there must be in it, the accumulation of years; and Edgerley is quite one of the old houses. Mr. Gledhow once told me it was."

"But the kindness seems to me wonderful," said Molly; "I could hardly help crying as I thanked Lady Horsham."

"I believe you think more of the kindness because she happens to be Lady Horsham," said Berris. "Of course it is kind of her, but at the same time I expect she leads a very dull life at this time of year, when most of her neighbors go to London; and you know that we are very nice girls, and we are also pleasant to look at; but I am really pleased, and how lucky it is that we have nice frocks to go to Edgerley in!"

CHAPTER IV.

A PROPOSAL.

LADY HORSHAM kept her promise. Two days after her meeting with Molly the girl received a kind note asking her and her sister to spend the following Saturday afternoon at Edgerley manor-house.

The note came just as the girls had finished dinner, and Berris stretched herself full length on the sofa, while she questioned her sister.

"I never thought of asking you what Lady Horsham is like. I fancy she is faded and dowdy, eh?"

"No, she was handsomely dressed when I saw her, and she must have been very handsome, a Juno-looking woman, with regular features and large pale blue eyes. Her paleness spoils her; even her hair wants color, but I expect she has a very white skin."

Berris sat upright on the sofa.

"Amazing! and I felt sure she was a thorough old dowdy of a country gentlewoman. I believe you have romanced a bit, Molly, though it is possible that her ladyship puts on her best gown when she drives into Northminster."

Molly was already busy with her copying. Berris lay down again, and began to forecast the pleasure in store for her. She did not mean it to consist in being asked now and then to spend the afternoon at the manor-house. She resolved to make Lady Horsham take such a fancy to her that she would ask her to stay, and then she should manage to get Mr. Statham asked over; that would be delightful, for it occurred to the girl, as she lay playing with her slender white fingers, that the society of Lady Horsham and her husband might prove a trifle dull.

She had become so much interested in arranging her future, that when Molly asked her to come out for a walk Berris preferred to continue her reverie: It soon reached a very exciting point. Lady Horsham had adopted her as a daughter, and had given her consent to Berris' marriage with Mr. Statham, who, by some legal process which the girl fancied quite practicable, was to succeed Sir Joshua in his baronetcy, so that she would in course of time become Lady Horsham; at this point the door opened and the bare-armed, rough-headed maid announced Mr. Statham.

Berris jumped up, but she felt confused, scarcely able to shake off her dream.

Mr. Statham came forward smiling; his eyes were brighter than Berris had ever seen them. He was delighted to find her alone, and they were soon seated, and he was happy listening to her singularly sweet voice. She was eager to tell him of

the invitation to Edgerley; she fancied he would think more highly of her when he knew that she was to visit Lady Horsham, for she had often been amused by Mr. Gledhow's reverence for titled people.

"Solicitors are such creatures of red tape, they are sure to think alike," she said to herself.

But Mr. Statham did not look as much pleased as she expected; he began to ask about her journey home, and to repeat his excuses for not having been able to accompany her. He was in fact so much disturbed by her news that he hardly knew what he was talking about; he disliked the idea of this visit; he did not wish Berris to be seen by the idle set of men who would be sure to visit at Edgerley. They would turn her head, he thought, or perhaps one of them would make love to this beautiful creature, who bewitched him more and more as he looked at her.

The girl was so thoroughly happy that the enjoyment betrayed itself in her looks and her manner. She talked and laughed gayly, and then, becoming suddenly aware of Mr. Statham's complete silence, she looked at him. The love she saw in his eyes made hers droop, and she too was silent. Berris had a dim, confused sense that this was something different from the admiration which till now she had taken as her due; she felt timid—conscious, too, that she was not worthy of this thoughtful, clever man, so much better than any one she had talked with.

The silence became oppressive; it seemed to the girl as if she could not bear it, and yet it was full of a mysterious charm. She would not break it, lest she should scatter the hope which its mystery seemed to promise: the hope that she was deeply and truly loved. Those few minutes of suspense had done for Berris that which they often do for a woman: in the light of this man's true, strong love, she keenly felt her own inferiority, and such a feeling came to her as a unique experience.

The man broke the silence.

"I must speak," his voice sounded hoarse and broken, "even if I offend you; you will say I am premature and abrupt, but you will believe me"—he paused, but she was silent, listening with downcast eyes. "I ask you to believe that I have loved you ever since I first saw you."

He had drawn his chair closer to the sofa and was bending over her, as he went on in a hurried, urgent voice: "I know it is too soon to ask you to listen to me, and yet I must do it, or I must go away altogether; only give me the assurance that I have not offended you past forgiveness, dearest, most beautiful."

In his ecstasy of love, at last set free, he took her hand and held it pressed between his. Berris, deeply flushed, but struggling to regain composure, looked up, subdued, yet full of delight.

"I am not offended," she said demurely; "I—" she meant to say, "I am pleased," but she found

herself in his arms, while his warm kisses checked her words.

"Darling," he whispered, as he placed himself on the sofa beside her and loosened his hold.

Berris felt very shy; she wondered whether she ought to speak or to be silent. Her lover's flow of words had suddenly ended, in the bliss of feeling that she loved him.

They both heard the street-door open and close, and quiet footsteps came upstairs.

"My sister," Berris said shyly.

It had been such a relief to her when Mr. Statham had said he had loved her from their first meeting. Molly and Clara Gledhow had a way of saying that girls nowadays were inclined to fling themselves at the heads of young men, and indeed the younger sister thought that if Molly had known of her expedition to Woolton, she would have considered it a step in the wrong direction.

Mr. Statham rose as Molly came in, and went forward to meet her.

"I have to ask your consent," he said, with so bright a smile that Molly thought he looked handsome—"your consent to take me as a brother. You will be the first sister I have ever had."

CHAPTER V.

AT EDGERLEY MANOR.

IN the days that had followed Mr. Statham's proposal, the sisters seemed to have exchanged temperaments. Berris was full of sunny content, while Molly had become grave, almost sad, and left her sister to do all the talking. A part of Molly's sadness was caused by her discontent with herself. Even if she thought this engagement too sudden, she ought to rejoice in her sister's happiness, and she could not do this, for the simple reason that she did not believe in it. Molly had the failing which seems special to good people, a certain narrowness of judgment, and, dearly as she loved Berris, she was too near akin to her to judge her from any but her own point of view. It seemed to her that Mr. Statham was admirable, but that he knew too little of her sister to be even able to guess whether Berris could make him happy. In her heart, Molly decided that her sister was not good enough for this clever, thoughtful man, of whose single-mindedness she instinctively felt certain, and she feared that this quality in Mr. Statham would be lost on Berris.

"Berris sets more store on success than she does

on sincerity," she told herself, "she is so very modern. People seem to think so much more of getting on in the world than of being happy together."

They were driving along the high-road in Lady Horsham's carriage. The air was full of sunshine and of the indescribable fragrance of young leafage and the delicate scents of spring blossoms. Berris had been leaning back against the well-stuffed cushions almost exhausted by the vehemence of her enjoyment; she suddenly broke into the long silence.

"Molly, how long will it be, do you think, before John will be able to give me a carriage?"

Molly felt vexed. It seemed to her that, if she were just engaged to such a man as John Statham, she should think of him and him only, and not about the things he might be willing to give her.

"You will never have a carriage like this, Berris. I fancy John"—it still cost her an effort to call him by his Christian name—"would not consider it suited to his position. Did you hear him tell me how much he liked that old saying, 'All is fine that is fit?'"

Berris drew her heavy eyebrows together.

"Do not be a frump, dear. My creed is that every one has a right to that which he can pay for. You know how I hate debt, Molly, so you needn't begin to fear I shall be extravagant. But I should detest a miserable little pony-carriage, a sort of parson's wife's vehicle. I could not stand

such a performance; either the real thing, or no carriage at all."

Molly sighed. She felt that she could not understand her sister; she remembered how last year, when the Gledhows had come back from Switzerland, Clara had brought them some pretty carved ivory brooches, and Berris had given hers to the person who kept their lodgings, because, she said, she did not care to wear an ornament unless it possessed real value.

Molly knew that it was unwise to argue with her sister, but she could not resist the wish to say something of what was in her mind. "Surely you would value any gift from a man who loves you so dearly."

"You speak as if his love laid me under an obligation," Berris said quickly; "you seem to forget that I love him in return."

Molly had recovered herself; she felt once more motherly toward Berris, and she gave her an affectionate smile.

"You say I am an old maid, so of course I am no judge of love, but I fancy John Statham's love for you is a remarkable love. I think it is deeper than yours is, Berris, but perhaps that is as it should be, when you have seen so little of him."

The girl's lovely face flushed.

"John would tell you that I am not an ordinary woman, and therefore I do not inspire ordinary love. He says I am a sorceress. I know that any man who loves me must love me passionately; I

should not be satisfied with anything else. Do not trouble yourself—John is quite satisfied with me; it is because I am myself that he loves me as I must be loved. I tell him he must never alter or I shall give up caring for him. Ah, here we are! What a quaint old gateway, but it looks as if it wanted repair.”

They drove up the stately avenue. A stout, pompous-looking butler and a tall, slender footman received them with a reverence that gratified Berris and made Molly feel profoundly nervous, as they were ushered across a large, rather bare hall to a door exactly opposite the entrance; through this they crossed a long room stretching out right and left like a gallery through a pair of glass doors opening on the other side to broad stone steps and a terraced spring garden, gay with soft blue and white, and deeper tints here and there of pink and yellow. Along the gravel walk that bordered the edge of the terrace two superb peacocks walked, one a little in front of the other, and seemed to concentrate the sunshine on their rich, widely spread plumage. A meadow on which some Jersey cows were grazing lay beyond the terrace. Behind the meadow was the richly wooded, well-planted park.

The terrace ended on the right under wide-spreading cedar branches, and here Lady Horscham was sitting on one of the chairs grouped near a tea-table. She rose and came forward to meet her visitors, while Berris stood an instant taking in the whole scene. Even her exacting

taste was satisfied; she thought that she could not wish anything changed, and as she gazed she saw a vision of antlered heads among the trees of the park.

"How glorious! I did not know they had a deer-park."

She gave a deep sigh and turned to follow her sister.

Lady Horsham had been slightly prejudiced against Berris, but the girl's beauty and her graceful manner greatly impressed her; she could scarcely take her eyes off her. After tea, when Berris had wearied of the conversation, she strolled forward to the edge of the terrace and watched the peacocks.

"Beautiful creatures!" she thought. "I do not see why they should be called vain; they must know how happy it makes other people to look at them. They are right to show themselves as much as they can."

Part III.

CHAPTER VI.

SIR JOSHUA HORSHAM.

BERRIS had stood for some time watching the peacocks, when the sound of footsteps disturbed her. She turned toward the house.

She felt pleased to see a tall, fine-looking man coming down the steps into the terraced garden. As he drew nearer to her she saw that he had a singularly unpleasant face. The mouth was wide and coarse, and the long teeth projected; he had small blue eyes, which looked slightly furtive, half-hidden as they were under his shaggy, foxy eyebrows; he was gray-haired and gray-whiskered, but the grayness of both hair and whiskers had the same foxy tinge as the eyebrows.

He bowed, and then came up to Berris and shook hands with her.

"I am so glad to see you here, Miss Bedale." He looked at her admiringly. "I have often seen you in Northminster."

Berris only smiled in answer; but she had at once recognized Sir Joshua as one of her unknown

admirers, for she had not seen him often enough to find out his name.

Lady Horsham and Molly had come up to them, and when she had introduced Molly to her husband, Lady Horsham suggested that he should take her young visitors round the grounds, as she was not able to walk so far. At first Molly went on in front with Sir Joshua; Berris followed them in silence. She had taken a sort of antipathy to Sir Joshua. She remembered meeting him one day near the Cathedral, and the thought came to her that, when she was married, she should not like to think that John would stare at a girl as Sir Joshua had stared at her, and he was an old man with a good wife. "Nasty old fellow," she said to herself. The thought of John had made her feel good this afternoon, and she resolved to snub her host if he gave her any more admiration.

They had now reached an enormous conservatory. At one end was a small orchid-house, and Molly lingered here, delighted with the beauty of the blossoms already in flower. Sir Joshua left her and joined Berris, who stood close by, admiring the graceful growth of a passion-flower that had spread from one to another of the slender pillars that supported the glass dome above.

"We are going to have a photographer here next week," he said pleasantly. "You must come over and make a charming picture for us with this background of greenery. Shall I come in and drive you out here to lunch?"

selves in, and so spare Sir Joshua the sight of that bare-armed maid-of-all-work. But Sir Joshua was too quick for her. Beckoning to a man who stood near to hold the horse, he jumped out as if he had been a boy, gave a loud knock at the door, and then helped Molly from her perch. Next he lifted Berris down, and it seemed to the girl that he was unnecessarily careful and very slow in so doing. John Statham thought so too as he looked down from the window. He had been waiting half an hour for the sisters, and he took an intense dislike to Sir Joshua when he saw him with Berris in his arms.

Molly caught sight of Mr. Statham. She said good-by to Sir Joshua and hurried upstairs, while the unconscious Berris stood chatting for a minute. Mr. Statham kept his ordinary expression while he talked to Molly. He even looked interested in her glowing account of Edgerley and of Lady Horsham's kindness; but when Berris came up, and the elder sister left the lovers alone together, his smiles fled. Berris looked at him, but instead of coming up to her with a more loving greeting, she saw that he was vexed.

"It is over now," he said abruptly. He seemed afraid to let his eyes rest on her till he had finished speaking. "You must forgive me if I ask you to let this be your last visit to Edgerley. I do not like you to go there." He looked at her, and saw a sudden flash in the lovely blue eyes. He thought this was caused by terror. His tone softened as

he took her hand, which lay limply in his. "I mean, darling, that although no doubt Lady Horsham is all Molly believes her to be, yet I so strongly dislike her husband that I do not wish you to visit at his house." He paused. Berris was looking grave and obstinate, and he tried an appeal to her feelings. "I must ask you to trust to my judgment, dearest. Forgive me for being abrupt; I cannot give you a reason for my dislike, though I know it is well founded. You must believe that it gives me pain to vex you. You do believe this, don't you, sweet one?" he whispered as he drew her closely to him and kissed her.

Berris instantly disengaged herself.

"You have vexed me very much," she said. "I am dreadfully disappointed in you. I thought you liked me to enjoy myself, and it is intense enjoyment to me to go to Edgerley. Ah! if you only saw how lovely it is, you would not ask such unreasonable things."

She looked very reproachful, and he saw tears in her eyes. He felt horribly guilty. It must be wrong, he thought, to grieve this dear, sensitive girl. She was crying, he believed, because she had vexed him, and because he had spoken so harshly. John Statham was wholly ignorant of the vagaries of women. He had the most exalted opinion of the fair creatures. He felt himself to be more than ever unworthy of the love of such a rare girl as he considered Berris to be, but as he

thought of Sir Joshua and of the men who would be likely to visit at Edgerley, his self-reproach lessened. Since he last saw Berris he had been asking questions about the Horshams, and he had only that morning learned that Sir Joshua was extremely free in his admiration of pretty women, and that he carried his flirtations very far indeed, if he met with any encouragement. Statham told himself that he was the only protector Berris had, for a timid, unworldly creature like Molly would be useless in such a position. Yet he felt tonguetied as he looked at his beloved. It was so painful to differ from her. He had, too, a secret consciousness that her beautiful upper lip had at this moment a half-scornful curl, which he shrank from increasing.

"I care for nothing more than for your happiness," he said at last, feeling obliged to answer her appeal; "but I am several years older than you are, dear girl, and my experience of life has taught me that people who keep to their own station in life are happiest. They avoid mortifications, and also they escape the chance of coveting luxuries and pleasures that can never fall to their lot."

Her eyes sparkled, a vivid glow burned in her cheeks as she answered: "I do not understand. We may be poorer, but we are certainly as good as Lady Horsham is. I have heard my mother say that she was only a rich manufacturer's daughter."

He understood at last that she was angry, and he put his arm tenderly round her.

"Dearest Berris, you misunderstand me. I was not thinking of birth or of breeding. The ownership of a large fortune and the influential position which it gives does not necessarily imply the existence of either, but money gives a certain position, a kind of superiority which greatly impresses worldly and common-minded persons. Apart from this, their money entitles people to the enjoyment of luxuries which we, for instance, could never afford. Be sure that I am judging wisely for you, dear girl, when I say that I do not wish you to visit at Edgerley."

Berris drew herself gently away. She was awed by her lover's quiet dignity, and she felt that he was her superior in all things. She was, moreover, ashamed of her own anger, not knowing that its violence had been hidden from him by the self-control she had exerted. She was now anxious to efface the unpleasant impression she feared to have given.

"We won't quarrel about it," she smiled sweetly again. "I dare say you are right; only I want you to go just once to Edgerley with me. You would love to see it, I know you would. We will call on Lady Horsham—I like her ever so much better than her husband. Think how delicious it will be to wander about together in the grounds. You will take me there, won't you? I can't tell you how exquisite the flowers are. Say yes, dear,

won't you?" she pleaded, holding up her lovely lips to his.

What could he do but thank her lovingly for her sweetness? He told himself that if he were beside Berris on her next visit it would not matter who else was at Edgerley. But while John Statham sunned himself in her delightful smiles, he decided to shorten the engagement. For some reasons he would have preferred a longer period of courtship; he had thought that he and Berris would understand one another better, and be more truly in sympathy before they began the constant association of married life. He was also increasing his business, and this would naturally add to his income; a year's delay would, he thought, enable him to make his home more deserving of its beautiful mistress; but, after all, it would be better for him and for Berris that this question of Edgerley should not come between them, and Woolton was too far off to make visiting at the manor-house easy. He had a comfortable and sufficient income, and it was better to begin life at once quietly.

"I want to talk about a very interesting subject"—he looked fondly at the blushing face on his shoulder—"I want you, darling, to fix a day for our marriage."

Berris sat up and looked suddenly grave.

"Why should I? I am perfectly happy as I am," she said; "you cannot fancy how nice it is to feel sure that some one you care for is quite yours. I have never been engaged before, and I have not

had much love in my life. Other girls have always been jealous of me, you know. Oh, no, John, let us go on as we are!"

"Will you not consider me a little?" he pleaded. "I seem to get busier every day, and the constant longing to be with you is a constant distraction. I really ought not to come over as often as I do. You will shorten it as much as possible, dearest, for my sake?"

Berris laughed. "For the sake of your business, you mean. Think how short a time it is since I first saw you." She looked saucily at him, and his earnest eyes touched her; she smiled. "Don't look so miserable; I shall perhaps change my mind and want to be married in a few months' time. Just now I am enjoying myself; please let me be happy a little longer."

"I thought you loved me better," he said. "You do not know how dear you have become to me, Berris. I have not a happy moment except when I am with you."

His deep, earnest tone thrilled her strangely. Her eyes softened into tenderness which he had never before seen in them, as she sat thinking. She felt sure that she loved him well; then she was sure to be happy with him, and he would probably love her still more if she made a sacrifice for his sake.

"You will let me have two months to get ready in?" she said shyly. "I must have two months, please. Will that suit you?"

He was delighted, and thanked her most tenderly for this concession.

"Shall it be this day two months?" he said.

"Very well; it leaves only a little space between, but it shall be the twenty-fifth of July; and meantime"—she broke away from his lover-like thanks—"you will let me go and see Lady Horsham?"

"Yes, oh, yes." He felt ashamed of his own fears in this suddenly near aspect of happiness.

Molly came downstairs and he triumphantly told her that they had settled the marriage-day. Her congratulations sounded cold to his glowing mood, and he decided that Berris would be much happier with him than she could ever be with her cold-natured sister.

CHAPTER VII.

THE EVE OF THE WEDDING.

THE sisters were taking their lunch together for the last time in the old lodgings. Mr. Gledhow had insisted that they should be married from his house, and as Berris wished for an early and very quiet wedding, she and Molly were to sleep there the night before. Berris was glad of this arrangement; she did not wish to be identified after her marriage as the girl who had lived in a squalid lodging in Mary Street. She should not feel the slightest regret at leaving the old life. While her mother lived, especially during her latter years, life, the girl remembered, had been a series of disputes about trifles, and although there had been more peace when she was left alone with Molly, Berris believed that was only because Molly had a calm, tepid nature and never took anything to heart. She looked across the table, and she was surprised at her sister's sad face.

"What is it, Molly? You are not surely grieving to leave this miserable place?"

"Yes, I am," Molly said simply. "We have had some happy days here together, and—and we can never be together, dear, in the same way again. I

think one always feels the having to do something final. This is the end of our single life together, Berris."

She looked wistfully at her sister. Poor Molly had been working extra hard for the last few weeks. She had been carrier to and fro of constant messages between the bride-elect and her dressmaker, and there had been many other things to do. Berris had been in some ways singularly hard to please during her engagement; she seemed to make amends for her sweetness during her lover's visits, by gloom and contradiction in his absence. Her dressmaker and Mr. Gledhow had also exercised a cheering influence; their constant well-meant flattery could always bring back her smiles. Berris had vented her impatience on Molly, and she now looked with something like remorse at her sister's pale, tired face.

"No one would be surprised if you were glad to be rid of me. I have been horribly cross to you, poor soul, much-enduring creature that you are. Well, I mean to be awfully good to you afterward. When you come to stay with us, I shall want you to help me about housekeeping, you know, Molly."

Molly looked pleased.

"John must know all about his own style of housekeeping," she said; "he has had a house of his own for years, remember. He would not like my little ways; they are suited to those who have very small means."

"Perhaps." Berris looked very thoughtful as it

occurred to her how little she knew of her future husband's tastes and ideas on any subject. She banished the thought by the unusual effort of considering her sister's future.

"I have called you an old maid, dear," she said affectionately, "but I believe you will make an excellent wife; you are far better suited to marry a man with small means than I am. I shall easily find you a husband."

Molly laughed. She rose from the table and told Berris that she had better rest till it was time to start for Mr. Gledhow's.

"I have still several things to see to," she said, "and you cannot be of any use to me, dear. Lie down and rest; you want to look your best to-morrow, for John's sake."

Berris lay down, but she felt restless; Molly's words had disturbed her—"for John's sake." Surely, Berris told herself, she ought to wish to look well for her own sake; it was on her that all eyes would rest, not on John. What could Molly mean? There would, however, be few observers, as the wedding was to take place at nine o'clock. The sofa felt singularly hard, and she smiled as she thought that she should never lie on a hard sofa again. There had been a good deal of sunshine in the morning, but at mid-day the sky became charged with lowering clouds, and the daylight faded much earlier than usual. Berris rose, and began to walk up and down the dull room, wondering at the singular darkness. She thought

it must be later than she had fancied, and she went into the bedroom to look at Molly's watch. Molly was not there, but Berris understood the unusual darkness as she looked out of the window. Mary Street changed into a country road not far from their lodging, and this bedroom looked out over fields bordered by trees and hedges, and ended by a low range of far-off hills.

As Berris looked she saw a heavy, leaden-hued cloud-mass with rifts through which the pale gray sky still showed in places; higher and on either side, dark gauzy veils floated like the advance skirmishers of some attacking force. A tall elm tree, which had been leafless since last autumn, showed its delicate, minute tracery of branches against the dark sky, and while Berris stood gazing, awed by the increasing gloom, the blackening cloud-mass parted and showed a long orange cleft, which soon reached from one end to the other of the timid mass.

"It is beautiful!" the girl murmured, but she shivered as if she were cold. Berris was not superstitious. Indeed, she had a way of calling some practices superstitions which many other people called a very different name, but, as she looked, she wished she had stayed in the front room. That fierce light in the midst of a threatening cloud, from which she could not take her eyes, was to her an evil omen, a presage of a stormy life—storm, perhaps of shipwreck!

Berris was strangely overwrought. She was

lively when she was pleased, but there was more gloom than serenity in her nature, and when she yielded to depression she found it hard to rally from it without outside help. While she stood looking at the broad orange rift in the cloud, it softened in tone, faded to a pale yellow, and she saw the lights of the two little villages on either hand twinkling through the trees. There was something homely and genial in this, and she warmed from the chill that had just now so strongly seized her. She told herself that she was going to be very happy with her husband. He loved her dearly, and she would have a more comfortable home than she had ever known, for her father's failure had come too early in her life to enable her to remember her first home. She wished Lady Horsham had not gone away so early; she had meant to pay several visits to Edgerley to get hints about arrangement, etc. But after all, she decided that John's taste was sure to be better than Lady Horsham's was; he was accustomed to visit in good houses, and he would help her with his advice. "That is to say, if I want it. If I can only carry out my own ideas I am safe to have a pretty house," she said.

Mr. Gledhow and his daughter received the sisters very genially. In her joy at escape from the tormenting fear of being called on to receive Berris as a stepmother, Clara was even affectionate to the girl she had disliked for years, and she kissed both the sisters warmly when she had taken them

to their room. Miss Gledhow made a great contrast in looks to the two tall, well-grown girls. She was small and dark, with a tiny, intelligent face, from which all freshness had been early banished by illness, and a dainty though too fragile figure. Her keen, dark eyes searched Berris' face as she said:

"My father would not let me ask Mr. Statham to dine with us this evening; he said we must have you all to ourselves."

"I did not expect you would ask him," the girl said quietly. "He said he should come into Northminster by the last train, and sleep at the Station Hotel."

Clara Gledhow went downstairs.

"I wonder whether she really cares for him," she said to herself, while her father read the London paper which had just come in. "Probably she cares for him as much as she will ever care for any man; she gives him, I dare say, all the love she can spare from her pretty self. I saw her eyes straying to the looking-glass all the time she was speaking to me."

During dinner Mr. Gledhow was tender and fatherly to Berris. He had an old-fashioned courtesy of manner seldom to be met with, but there was genuine affection in his dark eyes as he looked at her. He had wished to marry her when she was younger and far less beautiful, and it had cost him an effort to give her up to John Statham; but he had the highest opinion of his young friend,

and he felt that if any young husband was desirable for so attractive a woman, John Statham was the best choice that could have been made.

"Though I feel defrauded," he said smilingly to Berris, while Molly and his daughter discussed arrangements for next morning, "I am bound to confess that I consider you a lucky girl."

He saw her face cloud, and the quiver in her lip puzzled him, it was so very like impatience.

She smiled, however, as she answered:

"You mean that I ought to be very thankful because John Statham has taken pity on my forlorn condition and has asked me to be his wife? I do not think I see it quite in that light, nor does he."

Mr. Gledhow shook his head at her.

"You are a saucy puss, and you very well know that I could not mean anything of the sort. I believe, child, that if you had only had the opportunity of being seen, you might have married any one you chose."

"That is exactly what I am going to do," she said quietly. "I am going to marry the only man I could ever have chosen as a husband."

She saw that he winced, and she felt a little sorry, for she believed he had really cared for her; but she reflected that a man of Mr. Gledhow's age had no right to think of a young girl as a possible wife, and she was glad to see Clara looking at her. She rose at once, and in virtue of her position as bride-elect she led the way upstairs.

"Molly stays with us as long as she likes," Clara said. "Afterward she goes on to Lady Horsham, and then you will probably be ready to have her, Berris."

"I wanted her sooner," Berris said. "We shall be home in less than a month. John says important business will be waiting for him, and I should not like him to give up important business even for me."

"You are going to Scotland, are you not?"

Berris had a great dislike to discussing her plans.

"We are not going to Scotland to-morrow," she said coldly. "I believe we are going to Folkestone."

Clara looked at her spitefully. After all she had done and was doing for these sisters just because her father happened to have a romantic attachment to one of them, it seemed to her that Berris might be a little more communicative.

"Really," she said with a tone of surprise, "then you are going to do that very stale wedding journey; you are going to Paris. I expected something more original from you, Berris."

Berris did not answer; she knew that they were only going to Paris for a few days, because she had expressed a decided wish to go abroad. It had been plain to her that John would have preferred Scotland, or any journey which did not involve crossing the Channel, but she had never been abroad, and when he told her to settle it as she

pleased, she decided on Paris as a first step in their holiday.

It annoyed her that Clara should have ferreted this out, but it gave Berris secret satisfaction. She had always resented the long descriptions in which Miss Gledhow had indulged about the foreign journeys she shared with her father.

"You would have it so early, dear; so it now it must stand," Miss Gledhow continued, "but I think you will make a very showy bride, so it seems a pity you should rob the people of the sight of your wedding. I am not likely to be married; but if I were, I certainly would not choose nine o'clock in the morning. Poor Lady Horsham said she certainly should have come in, but you see her breakfast-hour is half-past nine. Really I call nine a barbarous hour for a wedding. Why did you choose it?"

The flush on the girl's cheeks deepened. She never has, as she expressed it, "got on well" with Clara Gledhow, but it was very long since she had spent so much time in her company.

"Because I hate a fuss," she said slowly, "and also because unless I could have a really grand wedding I prefer an extremely quiet one. If we had been married later in the day, it would have been necessary, as you say, to ask Lady Horsham and perhaps others, and already I am giving you and your father more trouble than I care for; besides, I do not wish to have half the town staring at me in my wedding-clothes."

"Only your travelling-dress, after all," Clara said. "Molly tells me that you have not had made up the beautiful wedding-gown my father gave you."

"I mean to appear in it at your first ball, dear," Berris said carelessly. "I shall tell your father he ought to give one in my honor when ball time comes round. By the by, I did not know the Horshams were at Edgerley; she wrote to me from Vienna."

"Lady Horsham came home two days ago; Sir Joshua stayed in London."

There was silence after this. When Mr. Gledhow came upstairs he took an affectionate leave of his visitors, and they separated early.

It was a cloudy morning, and a drizzling rain made the weather chilly as they drove to church. Very few people were about, and no one noticed the quiet, unpretentious carriage. A tide of bitterness swept over Berris. She was thoroughly conscious of her own remarkable beauty, and she felt sure that if she had only chosen to wait she might have made a distinguished marriage. Had not Mr. Gledhow said so? And in that case there would have been admiring crowds to see her, and her wedding would have been chronicled in the fashionable newspapers. She tossed her head back with a feeling of self-contempt. She did not care for fashion; she despised it. She had more than once ridiculed Clara Gledhow because she had her dresses made in Paris, and bought a bonnet there

whenever she had a chance. Berris had told Miss Morant that in making her dresses she was to study the make that would best set off her figure, rather than follow fashion in any slavish way. She knew that one of her charms in John's eyes was that she was different from any one else, and his approval on this point had been doubly grateful, because her mother had always found fault with her love of singularity. Even quiet Molly had sometimes ventured a remonstrance on the subject. Berris had worn black for the first six weeks of her engagement, so that really Mr. Statham had not had much chance of judging whether her taste in color was to his liking.

Part IV.

CHAPTER VIII.

MARRIED.

BERRIS smiled as they drove along. She was thinking of the surprise that was in store for John. He had always seen her in mourning in those dismal lodgings; and when she took her place as mistress of her new home she should be as different from her old self as a butterfly is different from a chrysalis. This had been one of her reasons for keeping the marriage so quiet. She intended to come back to Northminster as a new person. Mrs. Statham would have nothing in common with one of those poor Bedale girls. She smiled again as she thought that her face could never be forgotten by any one who had seen it.

The carriage stopped at the church, and Berris saw with dismay that her landlady and some other women of the same class were going up the steps. Her eyes sparkled with anger. She felt sure that Molly had let out the time, which she had determined should be kept secret from every one, but Molly was in the other carriage with Miss Gled-

how, so she had to keep her vexation to herself. She took Mr. Gledhow's arm and went into the narrow, old-fashioned church. She almost stopped short when she saw that the front rows of the high pews were filled with gazers, who had risen as she entered and stood staring at her as she came up the centre of the church. Berris held her head even higher than usual. She looked neither to the right nor left, and then her vexation fled, for she saw John Statham waiting for her in front of the altar-rails. She felt suddenly at peace with herself, and she forgot the staring eyes around her. She had a sort of vague religion of her own. She had resolved this morning to be a good and loving wife, and not to be cross to her husband as she had been to Molly; and now this peaceful feeling made her sure that she should keep to her resolution. She looked a very lovely bride, as with downcast eyes she took her place beside John Statham.

It was like a dream to feel that the service was over, all the solemn promises had been made, the clergyman had given his blessing, and John was leading her into the little dingy vestry to sign her name.

Berris felt strangely good and timid as her husband put her into the carriage and then followed her. The news of the wedding had spread, and when they reached Mr. Gledhow's house a little crowd had formed round the door. John Statham smiled at every one. He was too happy to be

vexed at anything. Berris wondered at him, but she was silent. Her resolution was too fresh to yield to any vexation on her wedding-day. They were to start in less than an hour, and she asked that the carriage might be sent away and return, so as to give the crowd no excuse for loitering. No one but Molly knew that she was vexed.

At last the troubles of the day were ended. She and her husband had driven to the station and were alone in their compartment. Berris drew a long breath of relief.

"Sighing already?"—he gave her a tender smile—"you are tired, darling."

"No, not tired now," she smiled brightly at him, "but I was so very tired of all that idle curiosity. You know that I have no curiosity of that sort. I never care to know what my neighbors are doing. I really felt quite cross," she looked at him shyly under her eyelashes. "Only fancy! cross on my wedding-day! Wasn't that sad?"

"You would never be cross, as you call it, for long, dearest; and after all, I expect it was a great pleasure to those poor people to see you. I suppose you do not guess what a lovely picture you made."

Berris laughed. "I am glad you like my get-up. I think it is rather nice."

She looked at her pretty gown, and then she sat silent a few minutes, as if she were making up her mind. She glanced up at last. Her husband's eyes were fixed on her face, as if her silence puzzled him.

"I wonder," she said, "which you will agree with, Molly or me, on a particular subject."

"You, I should fancy, darling. Husbands and wives are bound to think alike as much as they can, are they not?"

He laughed as he spoke, but Berris was looking serious.

"I wonder what the particular subject is?" he added.

"I think Molly is quite wrong, so I hope you will not agree with her. She says that people can alter. For instance, if a person has a tiresome habit he or she can cure him or herself of it; and I say no, as people are born so they will be to the end. You can't alter the shape of your nose, so how can you alter your feelings? There is no use in worrying others in the hope of improving them, is there? I'm sure it's useless to try to alter one's self; besides, some people's faults improve them: every fault brings its virtue is a proverb, I fancy."

John Statham had never heard this proverb, but it did not trouble him. He did not feel inclined to lecture his charming wife, whatever nonsense it might suit her to talk. He leaned back beside her, listening to her sweet voice and wondering at his own happiness. It seemed as if this was only a happy dream, from which he should presently awake.

She looked at him inquiringly, as he did not answer, and she took his happy smile for consent.

"I see you agree with me," she said. "I am

so glad. It would have been a pity to disagree on our wedding-day. It is much better, isn't it, to have a high temper and a warm heart than to be always level-tempered and calm?"

He put his arm round her and looked at her fondly.

"I want you to be always what you are, darling," he said. "I could not love you so dearly if you were different."

She gave him a grateful, tender smile, for he had removed a great weight from her spirits. Except on that one occasion when he had spoken so strongly about her visits to Edgerley, Berris had always seemed to her lover the very incarnation of sweetness; and one day, when she was alone with Molly, her sister had said, after a passionate outbreak from Berris, that unless she strove to control her temper it would infallibly break out against her husband and would surprise and shock him.

"I shall tell him I have a temper," Berris answered, "and then he will be careful not to thwart me; but he loves me too well to vex me, and I am always good-tempered when I have my own way."

And now she had tried to keep her word. She had tried to tell tales of herself, and he did not care to listen. She decided it was much better so. Most likely they should never disagree, and if they did John would be sure to give way.

The bustle at the great London station excited Berris. She looked round her eagerly, so com-

pletely carried out of herself that she forgot to notice how much attention she excited. They were soon in a cab. Berris would have preferred a hansom, and then she remembered the luggage. As they drove out of the station a hansom cab drove past them at a furious rate. Its occupant bowed, and they both recognized Sir Joshua Horsham.

"What an ugly face he has!" Berris said, turning to her husband. He was looking fixedly at her with an expression that puzzled her. "A penny for your thoughts!" she said gayly. Secretly she wished they had not had this meeting, which recalled the only unpleasant memory of their engagement.

"I am rather ashamed of them," he said, "for they seem to cast a doubt on you; but you know I could not mean that really, darling."

"Let me hear them," she said gently. "I like to know that you were thinking of me."

"Of whom should I think?" He looked at her so tenderly that she was satisfied. Then he went on: "I was thinking whether after all I had not been selfish in trying to make you love me, when if you had been left free you might have married some far richer man, who could at once have placed you in the position that you deserve."

Berris felt strangely impressed. For an instant she looked gravely at him; then her natural contradiction came to help her against herself. She gave him a saucy smile.

“Do you mean an old fright like Sir Joshua? No, thank you; I made my own choice when I took you, dear. You will be very rich some day—you are so clever.”

He looked pleased, she thought; but as they were just then in a busy part of London he could not thank her as she felt she ought to be thanked for such a speech.

CHAPTER IX.

AT HOME.

THE honeymoon had passed in a satisfactory manner. Berris had been spoiled to her heart's content, and both in London and Paris and Scotland John Statham had tried to make her life as full of amusement and variety as possible. She had written to Molly that she had not passed one dull day.

When Clara Gledhow heard the letter read she said that John Statham was making a mistake, and that Berris would find life very dull in her quiet home at Woolton after all this gayety.

"But it will give them so much to talk about," said simple Molly.

To which remark Miss Gledhow replied, with a tinge of contempt, that if a husband and wife wanted a subject of conversation so early in the day it looked bad for the future. Molly, however, reflected that Clara was thirty-five, and was perhaps inclined to be jaundiced in her judgment of a young married woman.

Molly was feeling very happy to-day. She was on her way to Woolton, and she longed to see her

sister again. Berris had written at her husband's instigation to ask Molly to live with them, but Molly had declined this offer, though she thought it very kind. She was shy and timid, but she was extremely independent; and she had a great idea of the dignity of labor. She meant to live in lodgings; therefore her household cares would be very light. She had few acquaintances in Northminster. Even if she had had many she would have thought it an unprofitable use to put life to, were she to spend it in listening to gossip. She liked to call on Clara Gledhow, who was associated with all the joys and sorrows she had hitherto known; and although Lady Horsham was such a much newer acquaintance, Molly always felt singularly happy at Edgerley. Lady Horsham had sent for her soon after the wedding-day, and Molly had spent a fortnight with the quiet, gentle woman. Molly was so much more accustomed to think of others than of herself that she soon saw that although Lady Horsham had everything that seemed necessary for happiness, yet she was not happy. Molly was sure that the poor lady loved her husband, and yet she rarely spoke of him, and did not seem anxious for his return home. Molly had left Edgerley before Sir Joshua came back, and, without knowing why, she felt glad that he had not been at home during her visit.

Berris and her husband were both waiting to receive her, and Molly complimented them both on their looks.

"Woolton air evidently agrees with you," she said to her sister. "You do look well."

"Come along," Berris said. "I want to show you your room."

When they reached it, on the floor above the drawing-room, Molly thought it very pretty. It was certainly a dainty little nest, furnished with light-colored chintz and white painted tables and chairs. On the dressing-table was a lovely bouquet of pink and red roses, and these seemed to delight Molly even more than the decoration. Berris looked very handsome as she stood watching her sister's delight.

"You are a good old soul, dear," she said, as her sister put her arms round her and kissed her. "It is a great pity you will not come to us for always. You would have a good time, and you could be ever so useful to me."

"Why! what could I do?" Molly looked surprised. It seemed impossible that she could be useful to so grand a person as she now felt Berris to be. Berris drew her eyebrows together with a look of discontent.

"Look here," she said: "you know how I always hated accounts, and how my figures never would come right as yours did? Well, John has got it into his head, and nothing can get it out of him, that a married woman ought to keep her house-keeping and dress accounts. He says I shall never learn the value of money unless I do accounts."

Such nonsense, Molly dear! Just as if I don't care so much about money that I grudge every penny that is spent without necessity; I mean on things out of sight which cannot signify."

"You mean," Molly spoke slowly—she did not think Berris ought to find fault with John, even to her—"you want me to do your accounts for you? Berris, darling, I should be glad to do anything I could to help you; but if John wants you to learn to keep accounts it certainly would not satisfy him if I did them for you."

"You dear innocent!"—Berris' lip curled—"who need be any the wiser, if the accounts are ready made up and balanced? It is that horrid balancing I find such a plague. Do you suppose John will care who did them? He will think you are teaching me—that is all; and you are such a good creature, Molly, you won't mind my taking the credit, I know."

Molly looked so very grave that her sister laughed.

"I'm only chaffing," Berris said; "of course I should tell him afterward, but it would be delightful to see his surprise when he looked at the week's accounts. You ought to have married John, Molly; you two have just the same tastes—you both like doing sums, and you like plain living and quiet colors, and you both hate fashion, and you are both so dreadfully neat and exact. I suppose," she said in an altered tone, as if she were

checking herself, "that is really why I am so fond of both of you—because you are unlike myself." She ended with a sigh.

"I believe," Molly said timidly, "that people are usually happier when they have opposite qualities; one can give whatever the other wants."

Berris tossed her head, but she remained silent; she was asking herself what quality worth having John could give her that she did not already possess. There was, of course, his legal knowledge; but then he had told her he had spent years in training to get that, and since their marriage he had more than once praised her for her shrewdness and quick-wittedness. No, she was quite sure she could not gain from John either in wits or looks; it was rather the other way between them.

"I'll not stay chattering," she said. "I only hinder you, and I want you to make haste. Tea will be ready directly, and then I want to show you our collection of photographs and the presents I brought you from Paris."

Molly was glad to be left alone; her head was in a whirl; it seemed to her equally strange and painful that Berris should speak in this way of her husband; it was, to say the least of it, disrespectful, Molly thought. She had always noticed the extreme respect with which Lady Horsham spoke of Sir Joshua; and yet for years past—long before she made their acquaintance—Molly had heard stories in Northminster about his conduct as a husband which certainly were not to his credit.

She reflected, however, that in the old days Berris had never meant all she said, and had very often exaggerated on purpose, as she expressed it, to "draw" Molly. She might have been doing this with regard to her married life, her sister thought.

Molly felt cheered by this last reflection; and going downstairs she found Berris and her husband, who had come upstairs to tea in honor of Molly, laughing and talking in the drawing-room.

After tea Berris had just begun to show her sister the photographs and to talk of their travelling experiences, when the door opened and the maid announced Mrs. Harrow. Molly's eyes were round with surprise, but Berris had been prepared by her husband for this visit; he had told her that Mrs. Harrow had put her affairs into his hands and had asked if she might call on Berris.

Molly greatly admired the easy grace with which Berris received her visitor. If Mrs. Harrow hoped to overawe the young wife by her condescension she failed; Berris was entirely mistress of the situation; she inquired for Mr. Harrow and the children, gently reproached Mrs. Harrow for not having brought her young cousins to see her—all this with an easy self-possession that imposed on the arrogant visitor as much as it annoyed her. Mrs. Harrow took no notice of Molly, but addressed all her talk to Berris.

"You are indeed a lucky girl," she said as she rose to go, "to pick up such a husband by chance, as one may say. I suppose you have to thank my

father's will for your meeting with John Statham; he will be a rich man one of these days, if he is not too fastidious in choosing his clients."

Berris was angry with herself, for she felt the color rush to her cheeks, and she would have liked to be perfectly unmoved by her visitor's insolence.

"My husband does not speak to me about his clients or their affairs," she said, "so I am not a good judge; but I should fancy, judging from the few I have seen"—she looked hard at Mrs. Harrow—"that he is not at all fastidious in choosing them. At the same time, in his position, he need not take any client he does not choose."

Mrs. Harrow gave her a long, cold look—a look which did not seem to affect Berris, but which made Molly shiver.

"How could you irritate her, Berris? she said, when the visitor had departed. "There was quite an evil look in her eyes; I should not like to have Mrs. Harrow for an enemy."

"Stuff!" Berris exclaimed, "she is insufferable. Did you hear her tell me I picked up my husband?"

CHAPTER X.

MOLLY.

MOLLY'S visit to Woolton had been shortened by the receipt of a note from Lady Horsham, forwarded to her from her former lodgings.

"I am treating you," she wrote, "like an old friend; you have been so kind to me, dear Molly, that I feel I may claim this privilege—only I must tell you beforehand that I fear you will not have a lively visit. I am not well, and my doctor does not seem to know what is the matter: he says I am hipped, and that a lively companion will do me more good than any physic. Will you be good enough to come to me now, that I have told you what to expect?"

Molly passed the letter on to Berris. Only the day before she had consented to spend another week with her sister, and she did not know what to do.

"You must go, of course," Berris said; "you could not refuse Lady Horsham when she has been so kind to you. You never told me how fond she was of you, Molly," she said reproachfully.

John Statham heard the tone, and he looked up

from his newspaper. "May I see the letter?" he said.

He was very sorry to lose Molly, and he said so. He had so seldom talked to his sister-in-law during his short engagement, and Molly had been so shy and retiring, that she seemed to him on closer acquaintance very unlike the idea he had formed of her. He liked her very much, and he thought her an admirable companion for Berris during his long business hours.

"Must you go?" he said; "I believe I have known you longer than Lady Horsham has. She has no doubt plenty of friends, and Berris has as yet only a few acquaintances."

"Molly will tell you that I don't care about country-town acquaintances," Berris said. "I don't mind knowing a few county people, because that may be useful to you in the way of business; but what is the use of knowing a heap of commonplace people who have no land to consult a lawyer about or any ideas about anything?"

Her husband laughed and looked at Molly.

"Is she not sweeping?" he said. "I am due at the office, so I leave you to lecture her, Molly. I really fancy she will find a few nice people in Woolton, if she tries not to be prejudiced. Try to persuade Molly to stay," he said to his wife; "we cannot spare her to Lady Horsham just yet, can we?"

Berris smiled and nodded at him as he went out. Molly wondered she did not kiss him when she

would not see him again till dinner-time, for he had said he had to go forty miles away on business.

"You will go to Edgerley" (Berris looked gravely at her sister). "John does not understand how fond Lady Horsham is of you, nor how important it is for you to keep her friendship."

The words jarred Molly.

"I believe I ought to go to her because she is ill, but as to any other motive it seems to me one ought not to calculate advantages in friendship."

Ever since Molly had reached Woolton Berris had taken such an elder-sister manner, and had also been so much graver, that Molly had meekly yielded to her in all things; but this last remark seemed to involve a question of principle, and the girl felt that it would be dishonest to pass it by in silence.

"I care for Lady Horsham herself," she said, "or I should not care to go and see her."

"Dear Molly"—Berris gave a little mocking laugh—"I always told you you were too good to live; I believe you are much younger than I am. In your position—especially as you will not come and live with us—you ought to try and make all the friends you can; I mean, of course, influential friends."

Molly did not answer, but she and Berris settled that she should accept Lady Horsham's invitation.

Molly had been three days at Edgerley when she discovered that life had suddenly become far more interesting than she had ever thought it

could be. She had been at first shocked by the change she saw in her friend. Lady Horsham was seemingly much as usual, but she was really so ill that her doctor was in constant attendance: he came every day, and Molly had already begun to look forward to his visits as to the chief event of the day. On this third day she joined the doctor and his patient in the long room which stretched across the back of the house between the entrance-hall and the terraced garden.

"I find Dr. Yarm has never seen our palm-house, Molly," Lady Horsham said; "will you show it him? He says I must not walk so far."

Molly felt at once shy and happy. She considered the doctor so very clever that she feared he would find her a dull companion, and yet it was delightful to have him all to herself. She glanced up timidly at the tall, dark-eyed man as he walked beside her, his head a little bent, and she thought how full of expression was his strongly marked profile. He was not handsome—his face was thin and his figure was too slender for his height—but he looked so strong and also full of life and energy. His hair had begun to turn gray, but as he suddenly looked up and met Molly's glance fixed on him he laughed as merrily as a boy.

"I do not know what you can think of me, Miss Bedale, to be so dull when you are taking so much kind trouble about me; my only excuse is that I was thinking of your friend. I fancy you are very much attached to Lady Horsham?"

He gave her a penetrating look.

"I am very fond of her," Molly said earnestly; "and I was going to ask you, if I may, whether you consider her illness as serious as she does?"

He smiled, rather sadly, she fancied.

"I should be sorry to give a decided opinion on my own responsibility, but I was going to ask you if you know where I can write to Sir Joshua in case I think it necessary to call in further advice."

"He is expected home in a week," she said; and then she looked anxiously at him. "I am afraid you consider her very ill," she said sadly.

"I did not say so, and you must not let yourself think so, or you will be quite unfit for your post," he said kindly. "Ah! here we are! These are something like palms, indeed."

As they went through the houses he explained to her the uses of the rare and curious plants, until Molly became completely interested. She had often been round these houses, but she had looked at the plants rather to admire the skill displayed in their arrangement than for their individual interest attached to them.

"I shall come here often now," she said shyly. "Thank you so much for having made the place so interesting."

His face glowed, his eyes brightened. Molly thought he looked suddenly handsome.

"I ought rather to thank you," he said, "for the attention with which you listened to my dry facts; it is a relief to find that you were not bored. I

wish you could see those bamboos growing in their native swamps, and those trailing parasite plants in the Brazilian forest. If I may, I will bring over a few sketches to-morrow. I make notes of out-of-the-way plants and flowers when I travel; they keep one's memory fresh."

When they joined Lady Horsham she asked Doctor Yarm if he could not spare time to dine with them next day. "You must help me," she said, "to amuse Miss Bedale; I feel that she is having a very dull visit."

"Dr. Yarm is not an ordinary man," she said to Molly when he had accepted her invitation and had taken his leave; "he has travelled and read and thought far more than many country doctors get a chance of doing. I only wonder he came down here instead of settling in London, but I fancy he is not dependent on his profession, and perhaps he prefers a country life."

Lady Horsham did not know the secret of Dr. Yarm's wanderings, and of his choice of this quiet part of England as a residence.

Soon after leaving Oxford he came to London. He was well connected, and he had plenty of friends, and he went freely into fashionable society without any fear of possible danger to himself. He soon fell desperately in love with a beautiful girl a few years older than he was. She seemed to share his feelings, and she encouraged him to pay her the most marked devotion, till at last, finding that she never would give him the opportunity he

longed for, he wrote and asked her to be his wife. She was an orphan, staying in London for the season, under the care of a chaperon supplied by the old guardian with whom she lived in the country; and he asked her permission to write to her guardian for leave to go and see him. He waited two days for an answer to his tender letter, and then it came.

His beautiful Adeline wrote to express her regret at the mistake into which he had fallen. She said she thought he must know, as every one else did, that she was engaged to Captain Armstrong, absent with his regiment in India. As she had lately received a telegram announcing Captain Armstrong's speedy arrival, she meant to go home to receive him. Would her kind friend Mr. Yarm therefore take this as a farewell letter? And since that time Michael Yarm had avoided the society of women as if they were lepers.

Part V.

CHAPTER XI.

BERRIS PAYS A VISIT.

BERRIS was seated in the most comfortable chair of her pretty drawing-room. She was holding up in turn first one, then the other, of her dainty white hands, admiring their smooth, creamy skin and the exquisite polish of her filbert-shaped fingernails; and when the fair hands lay in her lap she fondled them with a loving appreciation of the return they had made to her care. Since her marriage she had worn gloves half the day, and in Paris she had provided herself with a variety of toilet requisites. She was so careful to avoid any occupation likely to soil her delicate fingers that of late, even when her husband brought her in flowers, she gave them to the parlor-maid to put in water. She was sorry to do this, for she was very fond of John, his only fault in her eyes being his want of that which she considered a sufficient income. He had, however, explained to her that if they lived quietly and kept free from debt, they must

in a few years be much better off than they were at present.

Berris shrank from the idea of debt, but she hated dulness. To-day, as she sat studying her hands, she was asking herself how long she could stand this even, uneventful life. Woolton was even duller than Northminster. There she used to give herself a little excitement by going out, against Molly's advice, on market-days, and getting stared at to her heart's content by the strangers and carriage people who often came in from the country; and at Northminster she could walk up the road that led past the barracks on the chance of meeting some of the officers. She drew a deep sigh; there were not any barracks, consequently there was not any officers in Woolton. She did not care very much for army men. As a rule she considered them less clever than civilians were, and Berris valued talent in a man more than any other gift except wealth, always supposing that a clever man gave her her due meed of admiration. She knew that army men admired her, but it had occurred to her that the practice of admiration was very universal among them. She should not therefore, she thought, have been happy with a husband of this calling. She remembered that one of the officers had one day spoken to her, and she had afterward learned that he had a young and charming wife. John was certainly a devoted husband. One or two of his man friends excited her jealousy, because when they came to dinner they kept John

downstairs a good part of the evening smoking; and Berris had also felt vexed by her husband's praises of Molly's good qualities. This, however, was hardly jealousy so much as a dislike that any subject should interest him besides herself. John Statham had gone to Northminster to-day on business, and he had said he should call on her sister. He had asked Berris to go with him; but she had not heard lately from Molly, and was not sure of finding her at home. John had promised to leave his wife with Miss Gledhow while he was doing his business at the other end of the town, but Berris had managed to excuse herself. She had a headache, she said, and she wanted to arrange her books. She sent her love to Molly and an invitation to dine and sleep, if John found her at home.

Now, while she sat looking at her long, shapely fingers, Mrs. Statham wondered what could have caused Molly's unusual silence. She had not heard from her for nearly a fortnight. Of late her sister's letters had become very interesting to Berris; there was always in them some mention of a past or present visit to Edgerley. Molly spent half her time there, her sister fancied. While she sat thinking a spasm of jealousy swept over her. Suppose that indolent Lady Horsham had been exerting herself to find a husband for Molly, and Molly's silence perhaps been caused by the fact that she had discovered a greater pleasure in life than that of writing to her sister.

Berris rose hastily from her comfortable chair.

She felt that she must run away from this idea; she could not stay at home to brood over it. Molly had said in her last letter that Sir Joshua was expecting to bring down a large party of men for shooting, and that Lady Horsham wished her to stay and help her with her visitors; but Molly told Berris that she meant to go home—her shyness would make her useless to Lady Horsham. While she read that letter Berris felt sore and defrauded. She would have been exactly in her right place in helping poor *gauche* Lady Horsham. The conquests she might have made filled her thoughts and kept her so silent in the evening that followed the receipt of the letter, that John had asked her if she was well. She had not shared her feelings with him; her great desire was to visit at Edgerley when the house was full of guests. She was resolved to become a reigning favorite there, and she had counted on Molly's help to this end; but she knew that her husband would be more likely to allow her to go to Edgerley if he thought she was comparatively indifferent to the visit. She therefore kept her plans secret. It would be so very good for John to visit the Horshams; Berris was sure of this. He would associate with a very different class of men from the manufacturers of Woolton and its surroundings; besides, at Edgerley he would be sure to pick up business and to make good and influential friends. She repeated this to herself while she dressed for walking. It gave Berris distinct pleasure to make an elaborate

toilet even for a country walk, and the pretty things she had bought in Paris and London were still fresh and dainty-looking—too summery in tint and texture for this fresh September day, and at any time better fitted for the occupant of a carriage than for wearing on a country walk. Berris was going to call on Mrs. Harrow. If John were only richer she could drive there, and perhaps offer to drive her cousin, who had never had a carriage since her marriage, and if John made more money Berris thought she would dress in a very different manner when she was going to Ivy Cottage. She was singularly perceptive, and in spite of her secluded bringing-up and her limited power of observation, she had long before her marriage-trip thought far more about dress and the use to be made of it than many a richer but less observant woman thinks in her whole life on such a subject. She gave herself a long final look in the long glass that faced her bedroom door, and she decided that her elegant costume was suited to impress Mrs. Harrow, and that the poor woman must greatly admire her.

The way to Ivy Cottage lay down that white country road out of which Berris had turned to meet John Statham face to face when she had come to seek him in Woolton. She had never recurred to that meeting. John had spoken of it, and had told her the joy it had given him to see her sweet face when he least expected such happiness. Berris had listened in smiling silence; she

was a woman of the world now, and she knew that it would be unwise to tell her husband how anxious she had been that he should propose to her.

At first she enjoyed the walk. The fresh air blowing from the hills refreshed her; her vigorous health and strength, too, made her enjoy the mere exercise of walking; but she soon found herself in a cloud of dust raised by a string of carts. She was greatly disturbed, for the dust would soil her white parasol and its pink rosebud embroidery; the lovely roses in her hat would also suffer and require careful dusting, and although Berris loved dainty clothing, she disliked to take trouble for its preservation. She tried to walk faster, but the foremost cart was some distance ahead. Unless she ran at good speed, she could not possibly get in front of the procession; so she resigned herself to walk on, half-choked by the gray, gritty cloud. She reached her cousin's house with eyes smarting and cheeks deeply flushed with vexation.

Mrs. Harrow's cottage was screened from the road by a hawthorn hedge gray with the dust of a long drought. The girl who opened the door was tidier than the bare-armed help at the Northminster lodgings, but she was not to be named in the same breath with Mrs. Statham's trim, mincing parlor-maid. Berris felt soothed to hear that Mrs. Harrow was at home. She had been out on Mrs. Statham's previous visit, and when she was shown into a stuffy, tasteless drawing-room, she sank into a wicker chair with a feeling of relief. There

was a large round table in its midst, on which books were arranged to imitate the figures on a sun-dial. There were four wicker arm-chairs, cushioned with faded cretonne, a few smaller chairs and tables, and a stack of withered bul-rushes at each corner of the large gilt-framed mirror above the grate, still in its summer decking of tissue-paper shavings. Berris smiled and slightly shrugged her graceful shoulders. She and John had already had several fires; she had one indeed whenever she was chilly. Mrs. Statham felt that she was at all points invulnerable to her cousin's attempted snubs. On the whole she thought it was unwise of Mrs. Harrow to keep her waiting ten minutes before she appeared—the delay had given her time to spy out defects.

Mrs. Harrow came in rustling and full of smiles.

"So very pleased to see you, dear," she said. "I was so sorry you had your walk for nothing last time."

Berris talked a little about the weather and the dust, noting that Mrs. Harrow's eyes were devouring every detail of her costume. Presently her cousin asked after Molly. "Poor thing, she must find life very dull alone in Northminster," the pale-eyed woman said.

"Molly is not much in Northminster," Berris answered carelessly. She did not choose that her hostess should consider her in any way set up by the fact of Molly's visit to Edgerley. "My hus-

band," she went on, "has gone to call on her to-day, but I hardly think he will find her at home."

Mrs. Harrow's eyes never brightened, but they moved quickly when she was inquisitive.

"Where is she, then, if I may ask?" She checked herself as she met an amused smile on her beautiful cousin's face. "I did not know she had any friends out of Northminster."

"Molly is often at Edgerley. Lady Horsham can hardly do without her; she is so very fond of my sister."

"Is she? Poor soul! I fancy she leads a very lonely life; her husband is seldom at home. I should think your sister has a dull time of it with her."

"Do you know the Horshams?" said Berris coolly.

"No; we belong, as you know, to another part of the county—that is, we did; and—do not let this go any farther, dear, but the fact is, Sir Joshua does not bear the best of characters."

"Really!" Berris raised her eyebrows as if she were hearing news; "but then it is perhaps only gossip, and my husband tells me I must never believe gossip. He says an upper-class man is often gossiped about."

Berris looked so entirely innocent, she spoke so like a child repeating the lesson it has been taught, that her cousin could not be as angry as she wished to be. The younger woman went on to say that she

heard the manor-house was full of visitors. Mrs. Harrow shrugged her shoulders.

"Well," she said, "I suppose we cannot all think alike, but I should be extremely sorry, when my Agnes grows up, to let *her* visit at Sir Joshua Horsham's. *Your* husband does not seem to let *you* go there," she added quickly.

"We shall go there by and by," Berris spoke very slowly. Mrs. Harrow's taunt had stung her keenly, and she could hardly restrain her anger. "Mr. Statham has been very busy ever since we came back."

"Ah, my dear, he is not nearly so busy as he might be, not nearly, I fancy. I told you he was apt to be fastidious in the clients he took up."

Something in Mrs. Harrow's pale eyes gave Berris a presentiment of evil. She had been conscious from the first that her cousin did not like her, but then she was satisfied to be admired by Mrs. Harrow. Mrs. Harrow was kind to the poor; she did her duty punctiliously as a mother and as a wife, but she had a keen memory for affronts, and Berris' manner at the reading of the will had given her great offence. She had looked on the Bedale sisters as very poor relations, and she had felt sure of finding an opportunity of making "this conceited chit," as she considered Berris, suffer for her impertinence. The news of the girl's marriage with so rising a man as John Statham had for the time checked her cousin's projects. She did not wish positive harm to Berris. As

soon as she had had her little revenge she would probably forgive her arrogance; but it seemed to this respectable matron wholly out of keeping that, while she who had been accustomed to luxury was now obliged to live very carefully, this conceited child had everything she wanted without having raised a finger to earn it or to deserve her good fortune. It could do no harm—in fact, it was a simple duty to make her a little less self-satisfied.

“I do not understand you,” Berris said in reply to her remark, and Mrs. Harrow waited a minute or two before she answered:

“I thought you knew about it, but then of course lawyers have a good many secrets they don’t tell their wives.” She looked at Berris, and she could not help owning that she was beautiful; her complexion was so flower-like, and her eyes were so deeply blue as she fixed them attentively on her companion. Mrs. Harrow noted a slight crease on the white forehead, and a droop of the lower lip, showing, she thought, a tendency to discontent.

“I should think not,” Berris said haughtily; “a lawyer would soon lose his clients if he talked about them.”

“Yes, yes, I am aware of that, but he might have told you this without indiscretion, because he refused to take up the case. He refused it, though it certainly would have been worth a thousand pounds to him.”

She looked full at her visitor, but except that the

crease had slightly deepened there was no change on the fair face.

"You seem to hear a good deal of gossip," Berris said, smiling. "Do you like it?"

Mrs. Harrow became paler.

"I do not call facts gossip," she said sternly. "You have only to ask your husband whether he refused to act for Mr. Trimmer, of Glaiston, and then you will see for yourself. I hear the property is worth half a million of money."

Berris longed to go home, but she resolved that Mrs. Harrow should not guess at her vexation; so she kept her seat. She even asked to see poor awkward Agnes, who came in with one shoulder higher than the other, frightened at having to speak. At last, having promised one or two recipes and the address of a good London shoemaker, Mrs. Statham took a smiling leave and went home.

CHAPTER XII.

NEWS.

JOHN STATHAM looked so gay and bright when he came into the room that his wife forgot the wrongs she had been nursing, and received him with an extra show of affection.

"How's Molly?" she asked as she placed herself beside him on the sofa; "dinner will not be ready for half an hour, so you have plenty of time to tell me your news."

"Ah!" He nodded at her and looked mysterious. "How is Molly?—that's the question. She has written to you like a dutiful sister to tell you; suppose I keep my own counsel about the wonderful news, and let her tell her own story. You will not have long to wait, I fancy. Her letter will come this evening."

"As if I could wait! Tell me at once. I am dying of curiosity, though perhaps I have guessed already. Is Molly going to be married?"

John looked puzzled, almost bewildered.

"What a little witch it is!" He bent down and kissed her. "Yes, she is engaged; will you guess to whom?"

"No; I only know it is to a friend of Lady Hor-

sham's or some one she has met at Edgerley—a swell, perhaps.”

“Partly right and partly wrong. She did make Dr. Yarm's acquaintance at Edgerley. He is a gentleman in the best sense of the word, but he is not fashionable, my darling. I fancy, from what I hear, he is just the man for Molly. I am so glad. Berris, darling, what is the matter?”

She had sprung up from the sofa and was walking up and down with long steps, her head thrown back, her cheeks flushed, and her eyes bright with anger. At last she stood still, looking like a beautiful fury.

“Glad, are you?” she said passionately. “Why on earth should you be glad? Are you glad because Molly is foolish? So impatient, so hatefully selfish, to go and accept the first offer she ever had in her life! Such detestable folly! If she had waited, she might have attracted a man of real position; she might have helped to raise us instead of lowering us. Dr. Yarm! I will never be sister-in-law to a mere village doctor! It must be broken off. It shall be!” she said with such intense vehemence that her husband stared at her in surprise and alarm. He turned away and bent over the fire, stirring it to give his wife time to recover herself. He had seen Berris angry more than once, but this burst of violence was unexpected; it shocked him. He could hardly believe that he had heard rightly, and he turned and looked at her as if to convince himself that she was in her right

mind. She was standing facing him, drawn up to her full height, her lips curled with what he felt was contempt, and she was frowning angrily. She did not seem ashamed of her anger under his steady, pained gaze; she was too much excited to think, and even if her passion had not been completely blinded by judgment, her fatalism would have told her that it was too late to draw back. She had often been as angry as this with others, and now her husband at last knew the worst of her, and she would finish all she had to say. His next words only increased her passion.

"You had better sit down and quiet yourself," he said coldly, as if he were speaking to a stranger.

"I am perfectly quiet; don't make any mistake. You think I am talking nonsense." She still stood facing him. "I am in earnest when I say this marriage must be broken off. Molly cannot afford to marry a country doctor—a village doctor, too. If he lived in Northminster it would be different. I want her to do better than I have done, not worse!" She stamped her foot as she ended.

John Statham had never felt so unhappy in his life. He was glad that he had to get ready for dinner.

It seemed to him, as he thought over the terrible shock he had received, that he ought to have been more stern, more masterful; that Berris had been carried away by her passion, and that she would have been thankful to be helped against herself. He had always felt that his wife was different

from her sister, but she had seemed to him quite good enough. His own mother had not been, so far as he could judge, a particularly religious woman, but she had been a loving and dutiful wife and a very affectionate mother. And then he thought how different his mother had been from Berris. Surely he ought to make great allowance for his beautiful young wife. She had been spoiled. He knew that he had helped to spoil her; he had been willingly blind to the little caprices and wilful ways that he ought perhaps to have re-proved; but then after one of these little outbreaks Berris had always been so especially bewitching and affectionate that he had taken for granted she was conscious of error and would gradually conquer her failings. John Statham was above all a merciful man, and he believed that true love between husband and wife was the best possible safeguard for domestic happiness. Berris was not demonstrative in her affection, but he was sure she loved him, and they had been very happy. Who could say, if he were to force himself to lecture her, he might not produce a serious quarrel and cause a complete alienation on her side? After all, he had no occasion to interfere between Berris and her sister; it was not a man's business. They would settle it between themselves when they met, and Molly was coming to-morrow. Yes, he told himself, it would be perfectly quixotic if he were to dispute the question of her engagement at the risk of making a quarrel with his wife.

The dinner-bell rang, and he went downstairs. Berris had gone into the dining-room, and a glance at her face showed him that she looked tranquil, though there was still more color than usual in her cheeks. She was, however, very silent, and even when dinner was over, and the maid left the room, Berris said very little. Her husband thought she was ashamed of her anger, and he exerted himself to be cheerful. He chatted about an old friend he had met in Northminster, a man he had not seen for years; but he soon noticed that she listened with very languid attention.

He went up to her and put his arm round her.

"You are ill, darling," he said. "What have you been doing to yourself? I was afraid you were not well before dinner."

She drew herself away and looked gravely at him.

"I never felt better in my life. You are not used to my temper, you see, John, that's all. I am always good-tempered unless people vex me."

There was a sort of challenge in her eyes as they looked into his. His caress had shown her that he did not think so badly of her temper after all.

He stroked her hair and tried to smile as he answered:

"I would not let temper conquer me, darling. You are so good and clever that you can conquer it if you fight hard against it."

He was glad she had given him this opportu-

nity, but his heart beat quickly while he waited for her answer. She rose from her chair and shook her hand at him.

"Please don't. People cannot alter themselves or their tempers; as they are born so they will go on to the end. I remember I told you that on our wedding-day, and you agreed with me."

He shook his head.

"I could not have agreed with you, because I know that it is not so. If you saw as much of human nature as I am obliged to see professionally, you would know how merely outside causes—I mean circumstances, change of fortune, and other such things—alter people. Surely," he said earnestly, "if a woman sets to work in the right way she may make some change in herself."

Berris laughed.

"You poor dear!" she said. "Don't you try to preach; you can't do it even as well as Molly can, and she is not a patch on Clara Gledhow. Molly says people can't alter themselves; she says no one is really altered. Her plan is much more difficult than yours is, though she says it is not so difficult as I think. According to Molly, if you always keep on praying you will not be allowed to get into a passion or do anything of the kind; you will be helped against yourself. Stuff! That sort of thing may suit Molly, but it's not in my line, and I'm not sure that it is exactly in yours, with all due deference. Give me a kiss and let me go; I am tired of standing here."

She went to the drawing-room, but she soon came back.

"Don't have a long smoke," she said. "I want to tell you about my visit to Mrs. Harrow."

She went back to the drawing-room, and stretched herself out on the big sofa. She was sorry that John had seen her in a passion. It had upset him, but he would soon get used to it. He had so much sense; it was much better that he should resign himself to a thing which he could not alter. As to Molly's marriage, she should settle that with her sister; there was no use in talking to John about it. Molly had deferred to her judgment during her visit; she should soon persuade her to give up the doctor. Berris had meant to ask her husband the meaning of Mrs. Harrow's assertion, but now she was not sure whether she would speak of it. John had yielded to her, and as she lay on the sofa, showing to perfection the long, sweeping lines of her figure, Berris told herself that she had best let well alone and be satisfied with her victory. The delay of a day or so could not signify, and meanwhile John might perhaps give her his own version of the story. She would wait, but if she found that she was kept in ignorance of that which it so nearly concerned her to know, she should certainly question her husband.

Meantime Mr. Statham was greatly troubled. If a yawning pit had suddenly opened at his feet, he could not have been more alarmed and disturbed than he had been at the way in which his wife had

received his advice. Her violence before dinner had shocked him, but he had been ready to forgive and even to overlook it, on condition that she would use the means he indicated as a remedy against its return. John Statham was clever. He was also sensible, but he cherished an idea shared by many other men that to wish anything strongly, and to give his opinion with equal strength on the point, was sure means of insuring its fulfilment. It had been a severe trial to hear Berris declare her opinions, and to realize how little she cared about amendment. He sighed heavily at the very thought. Amendment! What had such a word to do with his beautiful, bright wife, who till now had been the joy-note of his existence? He had forgotten to tell Berris that Molly had promised to come next day, but he hoped much from this meeting. His thoughts dwelt tenderly on Molly, for whom this afternoon he had felt a real brotherly affection. He had gone to see her, and had found her writing a letter. She seemed very shy, and he had fancied she was ashamed of her long silence, and then, when he gave her Berris' invitation, Molly blushed in a way that puzzled him, and told him her quiet little story.

"You see," she said deprecatingly, "I could not wait to ask your advice because Dr. Yarm wanted an answer at once, and John, dear, I feel so sure of being happy with him."

John Statham sighed as he now sat thinking over Molly's words. He did not mean any dis-

loyalty to Berris, and he knew that she was, as he had said, the one woman in the world for him; and yet, all unconsciously, he was wishing that she could learn some of her sister's sweet humility. He thought Dr. Yarm would be a lucky man to have a wife who would defer to his judgment as Molly would; not from the superior merit possessed by Yarm, but from her own want of self-conceit, and because he was her husband. He turned from these thoughts, and resolved to be patient. Molly was coming to-morrow, and he must go upstairs and tell Berris so. Mr. Statham would not have felt so willing to trust to his sister-in-law's influence for good, if he could have seen what was happening at Northminster.

Molly had written a very happy letter to Berris, and she was looking forward with delight to talking to her sister and telling her the whole story of her acquaintance with Dr. Yarm. If John had been so pleased to hear of her engagement, she felt sure of Berris' satisfaction, for her sister had said when they parted that she meant to find a husband for Molly. Molly understood now why she had felt so strong a dislike that Berris should choose for her. She had seen Dr. Yarm several times before her visit to Woolton, but she had rarely spoken of him. Her engagement was only three days old; it had happened at Edgerley, when she had gone over to spend a quiet afternoon with Lady Horsham. Dr. Yarm had come to see his patient, and Molly had walked to the gate with him.

When Molly told her friend what had happened, Lady Horsham advised her not to see Dr. Yarm either at Edgerley or at Mr. Gledhow's until she had told her sister. She also said that when the marriage was fixed she should like it to take place at Edgerley, unless this would disappoint Mrs. Statham. Molly sat wondering at her own happiness and at the goodness of every one toward her. She was also wondering when she should see her lover; he had written to know when she would meet him at Mr. Gledhow's. The red-armed maid came suddenly into the room with a note.

"I was to say, miss, as the carriage would be here directly," the girl said.

The note was from Dr. Yarm. It said in a few words that Lady Horsham was seriously ill; that the carriage had been sent in to fetch a nurse from the Nursing Home, and that Lady Horsham had asked repeatedly for Molly. There was plainly no time to lose. Molly hastily packed what was necessary; then she sat down and wrote a telegram to Berris and a note to Miss Gledhow, to whom she had promised a visit. By the time all this was done the carriage was at the door.

Part VI.

CHAPTER XIII.

MORE NEWS.

BERRIS had passed a sleepless night. Before going to bed she had received Molly's bright, happy letter, and a little earlier had come a telegram announcing her sister's summons to Lady Horsham. It seemed to Mrs. Statham that she was a very ill-used person. It was tiresome enough to learn that her sister had engaged herself to an unsuitable person, and then when she was looking forward to seeing her and to using her utmost skill against Molly's entanglement, she was thus suddenly disappointed. Berris had even planned the conclusive arguments by which she felt sure of influencing her sister. This crossing of her will heated her blood; she had been silent, but the trouble she was in kept her awake, and when she at last fell asleep her dreams were full of distorted visions, in one of which she saw Molly being married to Sir Joshua Horsham.

She was still moody when she took her place at breakfast. Her husband was reading his paper, and for some minutes the silence between them

was unbroken. At last John Statham looked up at his wife.

"I don't know what you will say," he said, "and I am the more sorry because you won't have Molly to take care of you; but I have a summons to go to Reading, darling, and I may have to be away till Thursday."

"I don't mind, if it is for business," she said calmly; "good business, I mean, so that it is worth your while to go."

He looked surprised, and she went on: "That puts me in mind of something I want to know about. I was told yesterday that you refused to take up a case that would have been worth a thousand pounds to you."

She stopped; she felt frightened at her own daring. John was looking actually vexed; he was frowning, and his dark face was flushed. He waited a minute before he answered, and then he forced a smile.

"My dear child," he said gravely, "you had better not listen to any one who discusses my affairs. I consider it an unjustifiable liberty for any one to take."

He looked into her bright eyes, now keenly fixed on his, and he did not like the expression he saw in them.

"I am due in the office," he said. "I'll come back at eleven to put up my things and to say good-by, so you must think over anything you have to ask me before I start."

"Stop, John!" Berris rose as she spoke, and placed herself between her husband and the door. "Please don't treat me like a child, or I know I cannot help being angry. I am your wife; surely I have a right to know what other people know. Is it true that you gave up this business?"

He struggled with his vexation.

"I cannot take your advice on business matters, Berris," he said quietly. "You are clever and very quick-witted, but a lawyer is bound to keep his business matters to himself."

Berris looked very haughty.

"I know that, I hope. I should not dream of asking you a business question about a client, but when a mere outsider tells me a thing like this I naturally feel annoyed at having been kept in the dark. It's true, of course, or you would say it wasn't."

"Yes, it is true."

He waited a moment; he did not want to say what was unnecessary, only just so much as would show his wife that he could not have acted in any other way. Berris was too impatient to wait.

"How bad of you! how unkind!" she said bitterly. "And then you pretend to me that you wish to be better off! When you know how many things I want—things which any other man but you would know I ought to have. Only think what a thousand pounds would do for us! I believe I could even have had that diamond bracelet I wanted so much. I call it hateful of you to

give up anything that would have made me happy!"

His annoyance was almost past bearing, but he again managed to smile at her. He told himself that she was only a spoiled child, and that he must humor her. He was going to leave her for a couple of days, and he was determined to keep his temper.

"I don't fancy happiness depends on diamonds, does it?" He thought she looked ashamed, and he went on more courageously: "Think of something else, darling, and trust to me always to do the best I can for you. I should not wonder if you don't get diamonds one of these days, though you are just one of the women who look their best without ornaments."

He bent down to kiss her, but she turned away. He hesitated, and then, deciding that it was best to leave her to herself, he quitted the room.

"She has plenty of sense," he thought, as he went down to his office; "she will see she was wrong."

Berris was terribly angry; her husband evidently thought she was a child still. She went into the little snugery which was curtained off from the drawing-room for her especial use, and in which if she had been in a gentler mood she must have been reminded of her husband's love. The little room was filled with tokens of his care for her comfort.

But her pride had been too deeply wounded to

enable her to take thought for anything but her grievance. She liked being treated as a child when it saved her trouble. She had always been glad that Molly took the housekeeping completely in charge and spared her the worry of it, but this was quite different. She sat thinking, resting her cheek on her long, slender hand. This sort of thing might go on till she found herself a mere puppet. Berris was extremely practical, and it seemed to her that the only way out of this dilemma was to make her husband understand in some practical way that she was a full-grown woman, with a will and an understanding of her own.

Hitherto she had consulted John about her walks. She determined in future to take her own way, and not to be accountable to any one for her actions. And then—for the mood to which she had yielded herself led her rapidly onward—Berris asked herself why she did not at once show her husband that she was able to judge for herself. Why should she not go out this morning, and so avoid the chance of a lecture from him before he went away? She looked at the railway time-tables to make sure that he must start by the train he had mentioned. Yes, there was no other which would get him to Reading till business hours were over. She was soon ready, and going as quietly downstairs as if she feared to be caught, she softly opened and closed the street door and walked fast toward the country by another road than that which had taken her to Mrs. Harrow's.

She walked on and on, looking at the hedgerows and at the fields behind them, of which now and then she caught glimpses through a gap or over a gate. She tried not to think, and her strong will generally enabled Berris to do what she had decided to do. At last she began to feel very tired. She stood still to rest. Overhead the lark was singing as cheerfully as if it were midsummer, and from a stately row of elms beyond the fields on the right came the slow, prolonged caw of a rookery. Berris loved the sound; it called up the vision of some fine old place which had been in one family for generations, and which was full of the wealth and luxury for which she pined. In a home like that she should have been a queen, surrounded by as much admiration as she could wish for. Suddenly a church clock began to strike. How solemnly the deep-toned strokes sounded! Eleven o'clock! she had been walking more than an hour; she could not possibly reach home now before her husband started. At this certainty Berris felt as keen a pang of remorse as if she had intended to say good-by to him. She actually found herself thinking of his feelings and of his disappointment; but long before she reached home she saw that this was mere sentiment, and that if she meant to assert herself she must not give way to it.

Berris was so tired when she reached home that she lay down on the sofa, and when the maid came to say lunch was ready she found her mistress

asleep. By bed-time Berris had discovered that life might be more independent, but was certainly much duller, without her husband. She missed his petting and the tender admiration she surprised in his eyes when she looked at him. She missed, too, his ready, warm praise for her attempts at improving the arrangements or decoration of the rooms. It occurred to her that she might as well do something nice in his absence as a surprise. It would completely prevent him from lecturing her for her desertion; it would turn his thoughts in a fresh direction. Next morning after breakfast she went into his dressing-room, and she decided that he needed curtains and chair cushions. At present there were only muslin curtains and cane-seated chairs.

She went to the largest drapers in Woolton and looked over a great many stuffs. She had asked to be shown something cheerful, and the counter soon began to look like a brilliant tulip-bed. Mrs. Statham was fairly bewildered, but she did not fail to notice the shopman's obsequiousness; she felt sure he was fascinated by her beauty. At last she selected a gorgeous pattern in scarlet and yellow, and ordered it sent home at once. She had intended to make up the curtains, but when the shopman offered to send them home ready for use that evening she found the offer too tempting to resist; she would make the cushions with her own fair fingers. She was not, like Molly, a good needlewoman, but she had the faculty of creating an

effect with very little labor; and she could probably have made up the curtains with far more style than they did at the shop. She worked diligently at her cushions, and she was just finishing them when the evening post came in. Berris looked eagerly at the letters. There were several for her husband, but there was not one from him. At first she felt anxious, but the next feeling was anger. She had not written to him, though he had left the address of the hotel, but she thought he ought to have written to her; he was away amusing himself, while she was left to utter dullness. She looked at the other letters. One was from Molly, and she opened it with some eagerness; she had not yet answered her sister, and it was possible that something might have happened to break off her engagement. She was startled when she opened the letter to see that Molly had written on black-edged paper, and as she read she felt greatly disturbed. The letter was a simple announcement of Lady Horsham's death. She had died the morning after Molly had reached her. Molly said Sir Joshua had asked her to stay till after the funeral, and she had consented to do so. She hoped to come on to Woolton when she left Edgerley.

Berris looked dazed as she put down the letter; she remembered her dream. Was it possible that her wish to part Molly from Dr. Yarm was to be fulfilled in this way? She smiled very bitterly. If she had only had common patience she might have

married Sir Joshua—the position which her sister now filled at Edgerley might have been hers; and then she made a wry face at the thought of exchanging John for Sir Joshua Horsham. On the other hand, experience had shown her that you cannot have your cake and eat it. She had a kind and loving husband in John Statham, but there her happiness ended. She certainly loved him, but Berris told herself that a woman might soon get used to any husband. Her vexation at her husband's silence contributed, no doubt, to this very calm view of marriage. One thing, however, was certain: it was very sad for Sir Joshua to lose such an excellent wife. It was possible, too, that he might think of replacing her by Molly, who knew all the ways of the house and could take up its management much where the late Lady Horsham had left it.

This, Berris thought, would be quite another sort of connection to Dr. Yarm's; and on the whole it might be more desirable to have Sir Joshua as a brother-in-law than as a husband. She blushed as she remembered the way in which he had lifted her down from the dog-cart, and then she shrugged her shoulders. When Molly was mistress of Edgerley, Berris told herself that her sister would take a larger view of life and see everything from a different point of view; she would learn to make excuses for her husband and to shut her eyes to his follies.

“I should not wonder if he were to become very

fond of Molly—she is so gentle—and I'm sure she is much better looking than the dear departed was." Mrs. Statham decided that it was her duty, and in all ways the proper thing to do, to write a letter of condolence to Sir Joshua Horsham. She wrote it at once—expressed her sorrow for his loss and for the desolate state in which he must find himself; she added that she was so glad to learn that her sister had been with his dear wife at the last, knowing as she did Molly's power to comfort and help.

She had sent off her letter, and she was thinking of going to bed, for she loved early hours, when there was the sound of an arrival.

Berris listened; yes, there was John's voice and the sound of his foot on the stair; in another moment he was in the room and she found herself hugged closely to his heart.

CHAPTER XIV.

DR. YARM.

BERRIS stood knocking at the door of her sister's lodgings. Before her marriage she had hoped never to have occasion to revisit them, but it seemed to her that instead of writing a remonstrance to Molly—when her sister's next letter showed that she persisted in keeping to her engagement—it would be much better to go over to Northminster and try the effect of personal influence. It was evident that Molly was aware of her sister's want of sympathy, or she would not have refused to come to Woolton when she left Edgerley.

The red-armed maid did not at first recognize the beautiful, well-dressed lady, but a second glance brought a grin to her face which disgusted Mrs. Statham. The sound of voices, and then a man's laugh, surprised her as she went upstairs, but she did not ask any questions. The maid threw open the door in the way Berris so well remembered, and then disappeared without announcing the visitor. Berris saw that Molly was sitting in her old place by the table, and that Miss Gledhow and a tall, remarkable-looking man were standing talking near the door. Berris went up to Clara and they kissed; then, before she could kiss Molly,

Miss Gledhow gravely and formally presented Mrs. Statham to Dr. Yarm, and Berris found herself shaking hands with Molly's obnoxious *fiancé*. What eyes the man had! she thought; they seemed to be searching her through and through. She looked at him shyly, half frightened, but wholly fascinated. She was glad to put her arms round her sister and to hide her face for an instant, so as to recover from the sort of panic she had received.

She was herself again when she turned to Dr. Yarm, and he thought what a bright, beautiful creature she looked. His expression of admiration satisfied her, and she smiled pleasantly when Molly thanked her for coming over, and when Clara Gledhow patted her on the shoulder and said it was "quite nice" of her to do it.

"Dr. Yarm wants to meet your husband, Berris," Miss Gledhow went on; "when will you come over and dine with us? We can put you up, you know."

"John is too busy, I'm afraid." Berris looked again at Dr. Yarm, and she felt yet more impressed by his tall figure and strong, striking face; the piercing dark eyes seemed to draw her to him against her will, and yet she felt that she had as yet no power of attraction over this distinguished-looking man. She forgot that he was a village doctor, and, as she had said, a quite unfit husband for Molly. She felt determined to please him; if she tried she must be able to fascinate him.

She gave him one of her rare, sweet smiles, and bending her head with a blending of grace and dignity she said: "I think we have the first claim on Dr. Yarm, have we not? What do you say, Molly? Will you come to us to-morrow, and will you"—she looked at the doctor, and he thought her manner delightful in so young a woman—"will you come to-morrow and see my husband, Dr. Yarm? A man is always at his best at home, you know."

"Thank you, I will take your sister over, and then you will be sure of seeing her."

"Do not listen to him," Molly said, with a happy little laugh; "he is only teasing because I missed a train the other day."

The doctor went on teasing her, and Clara took possession of Mrs. Statham.

"I am so glad to have met you," she said; "you have become such a stranger, and I have been too busy to go and see you lately. Come to the window," she said in a low voice; "I have something to tell you."

Berris was annoyed; she wanted to talk to Dr. Yarm, and she unwillingly followed Clara to the window.

"I was going to write to you," Miss Gledhow said. "We—that is, father and I—are delighted with Molly's choice. Father says he is one of the most delightful men he knows, and he is so amusing! He and Molly dined with us last night, and he kept us laughing all dinner-time."

"Did he?" Berris wanted to go back to the others. Clara's talk always bored her, and to-day she seemed sillier than ever.

"I have not long to stay," Berris said, loudly enough for Molly to hear; and her sister came up to her.

When they had had tea and Molly had promised to go next day to Woolton, Mrs. Statham said she must go, and Dr. Yarm proposed to take her to the station. Berris felt triumphant. She did not wish to give Molly any pain, but it was nice to feel that this newly engaged man was willing to leave his betrothed for the sake of her society.

Miss Gledhow had already gone home. The doctor held the room door open for Mrs. Statham to pass out, and then he calmly went back to Molly and took his leave.

"Thank you, dearest," the girl said, "for taking care of Berris; that is just the sort of thing to please her."

Berris became tired of the doctor's conversation before they reached the station. His masterful manner pleased her; she wished John had it, but she also wished that Dr. Yarm would talk about something that was not Molly. He seemed besotted on the subject. Indeed, Mrs. Statham had a shrewd suspicion that he cared for her as Molly's sister rather than for herself. His praises of Molly filled Berris with surprise. She had lived all her life with her sister, but she had never discovered

in her the unique and shining qualities which Dr. Yarm said she possessed.

"You are certainly very fond of her," she said, when at last he gave her a chance of speaking. "Molly ought to be devoted to you, I'm sure. I do not believe my husband would say as much about me as you have said about Molly."

He looked at her inquiringly.

"You must remember that I am talking to her only sister. I expect your husband talked just in the same way to Molly about you."

Berris felt almost suffocated with mortification. It was evident that this besotted man put her on the same level as Molly. She was not sure that he even considered her to be Molly's equal; and then Berris told herself that she was impatient. Dr. Yarm had scarcely had time to look at her or find out what she was like; and of course men were always more or less blind to every one but the woman they were in love with. He would come to the end of poor, simple Molly before very long, and then he would appreciate the difference between them.

"My husband does not talk much to any one," she had said in answer.

"I understand that when he is with you, but I am sure if you question Molly you will hear that during your engagement he was eloquent to her."

Berris sighed; then she laughed.

"I was thinking that it is a pity an engagement

is so soon over. You will not think of Molly in this rose-tinted way a few months after marriage."

She looked up at him as she spoke, and his keen, dark eyes seemed to see into her thoughts.

"It will be Molly's fault, then, I fancy," he said, laughing. "I pride myself on a sort of cat-like constancy. I assure you if once I believe in a person it would be difficult to shake my faith. That is perhaps the greatest of your sister's charms," he said severely, for his companion's words had vexed him—"her simple truth; it is the secret of the confidence she inspires."

After this there was a short silence, till Dr. Yarm asked Mrs. Statham if she had heard of Lady Horsham's bequest to Molly. No, Berris had not heard. Molly had shrunk from telling her sister of the gift of five hundred pounds which the dying woman had left her as a "token of gratitude for the happiness she had brought into her life."

"The day after she knew of our engagement," Dr. Yarm said, "Lady Horsham asked me, as she knew I was driving into Northminster, if I would call and ask Mr. Gledhow to go and see her. 'With as little delay as possible,' she said impressively. 'I fancy she wanted to make the codicil which left this sum to Molly.'"

Mrs. Statham's eyes glittered; she forgot her usual self-possession. Instead of saying she was glad of Molly's good fortune, she remained silently brooding over the revelations the afternoon had

given her. There was no doubt that Molly's future husband was far more distinguished-looking than John Statham was, and he was as devoted to his *fiancé* as if she were beautiful, Berris thought. It was incomprehensible. And now, thanks to this legacy, Molly would be able to have quite a handsome trousseau—ever so much better than hers had been; and what presents she would be able to give Dr. Yarm! She could not help envying her sister this power, for Berris dearly loved to give a valuable present, though she despised little tokens only meant to show the affection of the giver.

"Will Molly be able to spend it exactly as she likes?" she said at last.

This question seemed to amuse Dr. Yarm.

"I suppose that will depend on the skill of her solicitor," he said. "I shall put Molly's affairs into your husband's hands. I fancy he will take good care of her, from all I hear of him. I fancy your train is signalled," he went on, "so I must say *au revoir* till to-morrow."

They were standing on the platform. Berris felt rather crushed as she shook hands; she did not feel that she had impressed her companion as much as she had meant to do when he offered to walk with her to the station. Never mind; to-morrow it would be different. There would be John to talk to Molly, and she should have Dr. Yarm all to herself.

Dr. Yarm looked troubled as he took his place

in a train that came in the contrary direction to that which was carrying Berris to Woolton. He was thinking, with that rapid insight with which so many doctors are gifted, and which so rarely permits them to misjudge character, how different these two sisters were, and how little sympathy could exist between them apart from mere natural affection.

Berris meantime was wondering at herself. Removed from the personal fascination exercised over her by Dr. Yarm, she could not understand how it had happened that all her plans had been shattered by her own agency. It was not a matter of course, she told herself, that because she had happened to meet her sister's *fiancé* she should at once have shaken hands with him. She remembered with a blush that she had done more than this; she had at once invited him to come and see her husband; she had, in fact, put Dr. Yarm on the footing of an old and valued friend. She did not see any way of drawing back; she had, as it were, gagged herself against any expression of dislike to him.

She met her husband at the station. She had told him at lunch-time that she was going to see Molly, and he had come to meet her; he was interested to hear the result of her visit.

"You have seen Molly?" he asked.

"Yes; I also saw Miss Gledhow. She wanted to know when we could go in to dine with them, to meet Dr. Yarm."

"That would be very nice," John Statham said heartily. "Did you fix any time, dear?"

"I said you were too busy." She was delighted to see how mortified he looked, and she waited for his remonstrance. He was silent; he had begun to understand the wisdom of leaving a woman to explain herself.

Berris was touched by his downcast look. The change of scene had improved her temper, and she smiled as she went on:

"I also saw Dr. Yarm."

"Did you? What do you think of him?"

"I asked him to come and dine here to-morrow, and bring Molly."

John Statham looked delighted.

"That was very nice of you, darling. You like Dr. Yarm, then?"

"I like him so much that I think he is much too good for Molly. He is not handsome, but he is just about the most distinguished-looking man I ever saw."

Her husband gave a sigh of relief.

"That's all right," he said, "but he cannot be too good for our good Molly. I hope he will make her as happy as she deserves to be."

"Please don't!" said Berris. "He walked with me to the station, and I had to listen to nothing but to Molly's praises all the way. I do not care for a second edition of them, please."

They reached home, and Berris saw a letter lying for her on the table. The envelope had a

deep black border. She flushed a little as she took it up, for she saw that her husband's eyes were fixed on it.

"Who is your correspondent?" he said.

"Only a return thanks from Sir Joshua Horsham," she said.

He held out his hand, and she was obliged to let him read the note. John Statham looked annoyed as he gave it back to her.

"I do not call that a return thanks," he said; "why did you not tell me you had written to Sir Joshua?"

"I wrote while you were away." She looked defiantly at her husband. "Of course I had to write to him, in common courtesy."

"I think not," he said curtly. "At any rate, I think it was a matter you should have consulted me about."

Berris looked hard at him, then she laughed.

"It is better to go with the times," she said calmly. "Husbands and wives nowadays are not like old-fashioned people; wives are allowed to judge for themselves. I call that a very nice note of Sir Joshua's, and as he proposes to call on me I shall be delighted to see him. Perhaps if I please him he will leave me a legacy. Do you know that Lady Horsham has left Molly five hundred pounds?"

"I had not heard it, but I am very glad. Lady Horsham was a good, kind woman, but Sir Joshua is not a good man, Berris. Of course I know you

are joking about seeing him, but I would rather you did not see him if he calls."

"John! I did not think you could be so prejudiced—so small-minded! You are just like Mrs. Harrow; but never mind Sir Joshua; tell me what sort of dinner I am to give Dr. Yarm."

This was a point on which Berris was always glad of her husband's advice. Her keen wits told her that Molly's modest housekeeping could not serve as a guide to her when she wanted to entertain. John had bought her a good cookery book, but she was glad of help in the way of selection; and she especially wanted to appear perfect at all points before Dr. Yarm.

Part VII.

CHAPTER XV.

ON TRIAL.

THE dinner was well cooked and well served, and Dr. Yarm was greatly impressed by this proof of domestic management in his beautiful sister-in-law. It is sometimes a puzzle to lookers-on to note how even a sympathetic and deep-thinking man is moved by who shall say what influence to estimate qualities by their results rather than by the motives which have originated these results. Dr. Yarm was surprised by Mrs. Statham's beauty. She was dressed in a closely clinging white gown of soft muslin, which suited her admirably, and relieved her fair, flower-like complexion, the brilliance of her deep blue eyes, and the golden tint of her hair. Berris had arranged her hair to-day with studied simplicity. Her quick perception taught her that she must appear to be simple if she wished to fascinate Dr. Yarm. She succeeded. As he sat next her he admired the symmetry and perfect development of her figure. He also admired her tact. It seemed to him extraordinary

that so queen-like a creature should listen with such docile and earnest attention to his talk. Miss Gledhow had led him to think that Mrs. Statham was opposed to his engagement to her sister, and he smiled at this proof of the inaccuracy of the sex. Presently Berris began to question him about Sir Joshua Horsham.

"Do you think he will marry again?" she asked.

"Possibly; but I really am about the worst informant you can have," he said, smiling; "I know very little of Sir Joshua Horsham. I have known his wife ever since I came into this part of the country, and I had the highest opinion of her. You knew her, I think?" he looked inquiringly at Berris. She felt slightly vexed. Dr. Yarm had evaded her on the subject of Sir Joshua; she therefore did not choose to give her opinion of his wife.

"Yes, Lady Horsham was very kind to me. If I had not married I should have been a good deal at Edgerley; but we live too far apart to visit, until we have a carriage." She said this in a low voice, and gave a furtive look at her husband, which puzzled Dr. Yarm. He was puzzled again presently.

John Statham asked his wife a question. He had been talking to Molly about his sister Mrs. Brown in Australia, and he asked Berris for a name which had been mentioned in Mrs. Brown's last letter, and which he had forgotten. It seemed

to Dr. Yarm that his beautiful hostess must also hear the question, but Berris went on talking to her visitor as pleasantly as before the interruption came. Dr. Yarm's masterful spirit rose against what seemed to him a breach of wifely duty.

"I beg your pardon, your husband asked you a question," he said.

Berris raised her eyebrows; she had some trouble to repress a frown. It seemed to her that her visitor was presumptuous when she was treating him with such marked consideration.

"Did you speak?" She looked across the table at her husband languidly, as if she were bored.

"Yes, dear; do you remember the name of the place Lucy mentioned in her letter? She said she was going to take her boys there for the summer. I gave you the letter to read."

Dr. Yarm saw a slight flush spread over the fair face.

"I had not time to read it—" she paused. "I am afraid I burned it; I did not suppose you wanted it again."

John Statham tried not to show his vexation. He had not answered his sister's letter, and he knew that there were questions in it which required careful answering. Mrs. Brown was older than he was. She had married young, and had gone out at once to Australia, so that he had not seen her for some years; but he had a high opinion of her, and a very affectionate clinging toward this only near relative. He had been anxious to

create a friendly feeling between his sister and Berris.

"Well," he said, after a short pause, "I shall take care how I give you my letters to keep. Used she to burn yours, Molly?" he smiled as he turned to his sister-in-law.

"I am not sure that I let her have them," Molly said. She laughed, though she felt ashamed of Berris' carelessness. "I used to read them to her to save trouble."

"Yes, dear, you always tried to save me trouble; I must say that for you."

She gave Molly a grateful look; then she turned to Dr. Yarm. "She is wonderful; she takes care of everything," she said. "I call her a treasure. She and my husband are quite patterns in the way of order and neatness. I don't profess to have the quality; it takes too much time and trouble."

She threw her eyes appealingly at him, looking, he thought, more beautiful than ever. If he could have forgotten that she was appealing to him to prefer her ways to those of Molly and of her husband, Dr. Yarm might have found Mrs. Statham's siren-like charm irresistible; as it was, he hardened himself against it.

"I thought neatness was one of the qualities a woman is born with," he said, laughing. "I believe you malign yourself. I am certain that there is a good deal of method about you."

One of his piercing glances went with the words, and Berris felt as if the light of those dark eyes

for the moment showed her her true self. A feeling of shame made her eyes droop, and then she fixed them on her husband.

"I shall improve, I dare say," she said gently; then, as if she was weary of her visitor, she turned from him and began to talk to Molly and to John Statham.

"Come along, dear," she said caressingly to her sister; "we will leave the men to gossip. They are sure to do it directly our backs are turned. You will find that out when you are married." She said this with a look of reproach at Dr. Yarm, who stood holding the door open for her.

He smiled as he went back to his seat. He quite understood that Berris had meant to reproach him for his reticence about Sir Joshua Horsham. Dr. Yarm had guessed rightly in saying there was method in Berris. The quality which injured her judgment and which overturned her carefully laid plans was the uncontrollable vehemence that contradiction aroused in her. This morning she had been ready to welcome Dr. Yarm as a brother-in-law; she had even begun to consider him a most desirable addition to the family. This evening she felt that she had tried her utmost, and had failed in captivating him as she had hoped. It occurred to her when she and her sister reached the drawing-room that it might be a good means of detaching him from Molly, and of breaking the engagement, if she could succeed in bewitching him. His coolness in directing her attention to

her husband had alarmed her, and had set her vehemently against him. It would not do, she thought, to admit so clever and so fearless a man into the family. He would perhaps take her husband's part against her, and now that she did not feel quite so sure as she used to feel of her power over John, this would be serious. She turned to Molly, who was looking pensively into the fire.

"What a talk you and John have been having all dinner-time!" she said. "What was it about?"

Molly smiled.

"Chiefly about dear Lady Horsham," she said. "John is so nice; he always seems to guess what one would like to talk about."

"Yes." Berris looked thoughtful. She remembered that she had been struck with this quality in her husband before she married him, though since they had lived together she had forgotten it. "Dr. Yarm is very different from John, Molly," she went on. "I am afraid you will find him a regular slave-driver."

The blood rushed hotly into Molly's colorless face; she was too angry to answer. Presently she said, "I think you can hardly judge Dr. Yarm well enough to speak so decidedly."

"My dear! you are in love and I am not. That makes all the difference. Dr. Yarm told me himself he knew beforehand that Lady Horsham was going to leave you that money. I would take care if I were you, Molly. I fancy you might do

much better for yourself than marry a mere country doctor for the sake of his looks."

Molly looked earnestly at her sister; her eyes were full of tears.

"It is you who should take care, Berris," she said with more dignity than Mrs. Statham had ever seen in her. "You seem to forget that I have promised to be Dr. Yarm's wife, and that we love one another."

Her sister laughed. "Why should you get on the high stilts because I, as an outsider who has your interests at heart, advise you to think it over? It's absurd! Come and play an accompaniment for me. I am going to sing this evening to please your man. He says he is fond of music."

Molly longed to say more, but old experience had taught her that no good had ever come of a tongue-battle with Berris. She had emphatically "*la langue bien pendue*," and as a regard for strict accuracy failed to check her angry assertions, her sister felt that it was worse than useless to provoke them.

Mr. Statham and his visitor came upstairs before the first song ended, and their applause restored harmony. Berris sang song after song. She had a pretty voice, but it had not been much cultivated and she soon became hoarse. When she left the pianoforte she found that Dr. Yarm went on talking to her husband, and at last when she managed to call John away the visitor placed himself beside Molly and seemed to forget his hostess. Berris

was piqued; she said Molly must be tired, and she proposed that they should go to bed early. She took Molly to the door of her room, but she did not go in as usual for a good-night chat. She was cross and out of sorts, and she had sense enough to know that she was in a mood to say something which might counteract the effect of her warning. She greatly hoped that what she had said about Dr. Yarm's knowledge of the legacy might trouble Molly and bring forth a dispute between the lovers. She would have been disappointed if she could have known that the words had not even lingered in her sister's memory. Molly was too well accustomed to Berris' random assertions to put faith in them.

Dr. Yarm was very bright and cheerful at breakfast next morning. He was very attentive to Berris, and she persuaded herself that she should soon cure him of what she believed to be a mere passing fancy for her sister. She felt that it was a thing to be done not only with regard to the family credit, but also for the sake of Molly's happiness.

"He will tire of her so very soon," she thought, as she watched the love in her sister's eyes, "and then what will become of the poor thing?"

"You will come with me to the station," Dr. Yarm said to Molly.

He said this while John Statham was speaking to his wife at the other end of the room, and something in his tone warned the girl that he meant

his words only for her. She left him to say good-bye to his hosts, and joined him in the hall.

"I shall not come over again while you are here, dear girl," he said, as they walked along together. "I cannot spare the time, but I will meet you at Northminster the day you return."

Molly looked at him. It seemed to her he meant more than he said.

"I am sorry you cannot come again," she said. "I suppose you will laugh at me, but I feel lost without you."

He looked down into her trusting, tender eyes. They were really more lovely than her sister's, he thought.

"I wonder," he said, "whether sisters tell each other everything after they are married as freely as they did beforehand?"

Molly smiled. "Sisters do not always tell each other everything beforehand."

"Really? I was under the impression that anything told to one sister became at once the property of the other sister."

"You are joking," Molly laughed. "When we lived at home together I used to tell Berris a good deal, but she was so very reserved that I am sure she never repeated what I said to any one. Berris is not such a talker as I am. She used to keep her thoughts to herself. Sometimes she would be silent for an hour together. I remember she used to say she should never tell me anything for fear I should repeat it to Clara Gledhow."

The doctor looked affectionate. His dark eyes were liquid as they rested on Molly's candid face.

"I do not agree with Mrs. Statham," he said. "Those who are brought up with us are not always those who know us best, unless they are especially sympathetic. If I trusted you with anything I should not ask you to keep it secret, dearest. Something tells me that you are faithfulness itself."

She looked so grateful, so happy, that he shrank from troubling her pure, serene nature; and yet he felt it was necessary to her happiness to give her a word of warning.

"I fancy," he said, "that your sister does not entirely approve of your choice. For that reason I think you had better not discuss me with Mrs. Statham. She is very charming, but I fancy she does not wish for me as a brother-in-law. She rightly thinks that you might do better. Well, then, there can be no use—can there?—in talking me over between you."

Molly stared in open-eyed wonder; it seemed as if he might have overheard her sister's talk last night, but she knew this was impossible.

"I quite agree with you," she said.

He began to talk of something else, but he felt sorry to leave her behind him. He was not afraid of Berris' influence, but he feared she might trouble Molly's peace of mind during her visit.

CHAPTER XVI.

SIR JOSHUA'S VISIT.

BERRIS had not answered Sir Joshua's letter. She liked to tease her husband, but she disliked his rebukes; and something told her that he would not easily forgive her if she wrote and told the baronet she should be glad to see him. Besides, although she affected to disbelieve the stories people told of Sir Joshua Horsham, she knew very well that she must be careful in her conduct toward him. Now that she was married she must not allow her name to be coupled with his. There was no advantage to be gained by writing to him, for John would certainly not allow her to go to Edgerley or to receive any present from Sir Joshua. It was, however, possible that he would call without permission, and she earnestly hoped he would not do this during Molly's visit. If he did call she certainly should not tell her husband; it would only stir up a dispute and cause John annoyance; but if Molly were still at Woolton she would be sure to speak of Sir Joshua's call, and Berris did not choose to ask for her sister's silence on the subject.

At last Molly's visit came to an end. Mrs.

Statham had tried more than once to discuss Dr. Yarm and his prospects, but her sister's silence had made discussion impossible. Molly's cheeks had, however, flushed, her eyes had so brightened, that Berris hoped her talk had made some impression in regard to the engagement. She had accompanied Molly to the station, and she felt privileged to give a final caution.

"Good-by," she said; "be sure you take care. I beg you not to throw yourself away, Molly."

Molly smiled and shook her head. While the train rolled slowly away on to Northminster she thought sorrowfully of Berris. Her sister had been very kind, even generous, to her during her visit. She had given Molly several drives, and had done all she could to make the time pass pleasantly; but she had not been able to hide from Molly's affectionate interest the changed feeling she had toward her husband. She did not often complain of him, but she spoke of him as if he had been an ordinary person; and to Molly it seemed a household treason for a wife to speak of her husband's failings, or even of his shortcomings, to any one.

"It is a lesson to me," she thought, "and after all Berris would only speak of him so to me."

Berris walked back rather sadly. Molly had been a restraint in many ways, but she missed her gentle companionship and her happy cheerfulness. Berris' planning for the future often came sadly in the way of her enjoyment. She was ask-

ing herself why Molly was so gay and untroubled when, until quite lately, she had had so little to make life pleasant. She could not find a satisfactory answer to this question, and she concluded that Molly's want of cleverness had kept her very childish, and that she did not attach sufficient importance to the affairs of life.

She roused from her reverie and looked up. She was still some way from home, and she saw coming toward her the tall figure of Sir Joshua Horsham. She was only puzzled for a moment about the course she had better take; then she went on to meet him with a bright smile.

Sir Joshua looked at her with wonder as well as with admiration. Her manner and the calm grace with which she spoke and moved impressed him as much as her perfect beauty did.

"I have just been calling on you," he said. "This is indeed a bit of good fortune."

He looked, she thought, lover-like in his delight; and he turned as if he were ready to walk back with her. Berris, however, stood still; she did not intend to take Sir Joshua Horsham home with her.

"I am so sorry to have missed you," she said; "and I can't ask you to go home, for I am walking in another direction."

He could not take his eyes from her face. It seemed incredible that only a few months could have transformed the pretty country girl into this stylish, beautiful woman. His manner became

more respectful, and her quick wit appreciated the change.

"I was so grieved to hear of your trouble," she said.

"Very kind of you, I'm sure;" but his off-hand manner showed Berris that the subject of his dead wife was not one he cared to dwell on. "Seen your sister lately?"

"I have just been seeing her off. She has been staying with us."

"Going to be married, I hear. He's a clever fellow, that doctor; not got much of a practice, though."

"I'm sorry to hear that," Berris said. "I hoped my sister would marry well."

"Did you? She's not like you, Mrs. Statham. You might have had the pick of the county, you know." He gave her a long look, but Berris did not seem vexed; and then he said in a low, earnest voice, "Why were you in such a confounded hurry, I wonder!"

"I do not understand you," Berris said. "I liked Mr. Statham, and he asked me to marry him. I was not in a hurry," she said with emphasis.

"I dare say not, but I'll be bound he was. I tell you what it is: he took an unfair advantage of your innocence. You did not know what you were worth, poor child; how should you?" He paused, but still she did not seem angry. He looked round him; there was no one in sight, and he came a step nearer. "If I had been a free

man," he whispered, "you should not have escaped me. Tell me, are you not tired of living in Woolton? You! a woman who ought never to be allowed to walk alone, left to take care of yourself! I am sure you know by this time you have made a mistake."

The flattery in this speech—for so Berris understood it—had at first excited and pleased her, but all at once she became aware that if her husband or one of her neighbors were to appear they would not approve of the way in which Sir Joshua was looking at her. His last question affronted her. She looked at him very haughtily, as she answered :

"Do you think people soon tire of being happy? You seem to forget that I care for my husband, Sir Joshua."

He gave an unbelieving smile.

"We shall see how long your happiness will last," he said. Then, raising his hat, he bowed to her and turned away without any attempt to shake hands with her.

Berris went slowly home. She felt strangely excited and angry, and yet with an intense consciousness of her own power to charm. It was gratifying to find that she had not deceived herself about Sir Joshua Horsham's admiration, and he must be a good judge, she thought. But she felt very uneasy as she walked on. Sir Joshua, she thought, would not have ventured to speak so openly if he had looked on her as his equal. It seemed to Berris that he presumed on his first

acquaintance with her, when she was poor and comparatively friendless. She tossed her head back with her old childish petulance. The next time she met Sir Joshua Horsham he should behave in a far more worshipping fashion. She was not sure that she would condescend to speak to him. Before she came to her own door she had to settle an important question. Should she tell her husband of this meeting, or should she trust to the chance that no one had seen her and keep silent on the subject? John would certainly be vexed if she told him. She began to understand why he disliked Sir Joshua. He had suspected the baronet's admiration for his wife, and had wished to shield her from his flattery. She smiled at this last thought.

"Poor dear John! Does he really think I can go anywhere without being admired! I am too well used to it to be hurt by it, and in my case it is not flattery; it is truth. I am so beautiful."

Molly's visit had restored harmony to the household, and Berris thought it would be a pity to cause a dispute by even speaking of Sir Joshua. John would want to know what had passed, and she could not repeat the conversation. It would vex her husband very much to know that such things had been said to her, but she gave a heavy sigh. "I dare say Sir Joshua is right in saying I had thrown myself away before I knew better. I have learned a lot in these last months. I was so very childish when I went to hear that will read.

Well, I'm very fond of John, so there's no use in making him uncomfortable. Sir Joshua won't come again, I fancy. Oh, dear! I seem to have muddled my chances somehow."

Her husband was in a very cheerful humor. He, too, had felt the peace that Molly had brought with her. Secretly he wished that Berris would practise a little of the sweetness which Molly seemed to infuse into the ordinary duties of life. He had noticed that she never complained or blamed others, and that she was often silent when she did not agree with her sister's utterances. The husband thought he had perhaps been too anxious for complete agreement with his spoiled darling, and that he should have been more successful if from the beginning he had been content to differ from her in silence. He certainly envied Dr. Yarm the deference with which Molly listened to his opinions, but then he knew he was not as clever socially as Dr. Yarm was. He had not travelled, and his profession had not given him the opportunity of keeping pace with modern literature. No, he could not compare himself with Dr. Yarm; and yet he fondly hoped he was better suited to make Berris happy, because he was more indulgent.

"I miss dear old Molly," he said, when they had gone upstairs after dinner, and he and Berris were sitting before a cosey fire; "but it is nice to be sometimes Darby and Joan, is it not, dear?"

She put her hand in his. She was really trying

hard to feel fond of her husband; for her thoughts would go straying away from him. He had noticed her silence at dinner, and had attributed it to the loss of her sister's company. He thought it was natural that Berris should feel the parting from the sister who had been almost a mother to her. Berris had not given a thought to Molly. While she sat eating her dinner in silence she had been dreaming of an impossible future forgotten, or rather she had turned from the remembrance of Sir Joshua's impertinence in considering the chances he had put before her. These seemed to her so dazzling that for a while she could think of nothing else. She saw herself Lady Horsham, dressed as she had often longed to dress, presented at court, driving in the park, seated at the opera, everywhere acknowledged as the most beautiful woman in London. It would not matter who her husband was—she should see so little of him, her life would be so very full. And when the London season, of which she had learned a good deal by newspaper report, was over, she should pay visits in country-houses, and go abroad later, to some amusing and fashionable place, for the winter and early spring. She had become so interested in planning her life under these altered circumstances that it was a perfect disenchantment when her husband followed her at once to the drawing-room, instead of smoking his usual cigar below.

His words had roused her to the consciousness that he was an obstacle in the way of her social

progress, and she had held out her hand in a kind of remorse and also because she felt the need of help against her own wishes.

There was silence. He sat fondling his wife's hand, happy in what seemed to him unusual gentleness; while she was glad not to be obliged to speak. She felt that she must struggle against her wishes. Her husband was not years older than she was. He was strong and healthy, and he was a man of such abstemious habits that he was likely to be long-lived. She shivered and looked at him, and as she met his loving gaze fixed on her, her fair face flushed with rosy shame. She seemed to herself a wretch to have been actually contemplating the death of the man who so dearly loved her.

"There is the postman," he said; and the maid came in with a letter. Berris stretched out her hand for it. It was directed to her husband, and she saw that it was from Australia.

She watched John's face while he read. He became suddenly grave, then he looked sad; at last he held the letter out to Berris and abruptly left the room.

Berris began to read the letter. It was written by Mrs. Brown's eldest child, a boy about fifteen. He wrote that his mother was dangerously ill, and that the doctor gave little hope of her recovery. The boy wrote that an old friend of hers had urged him to write and ask Mr. Statham to come out and take charge of his sister's affairs. The boy added

that his mother shrank from making the request, but that a former partner of his father's had lately been asserting a claim over half of the property, and Mrs. Brown feared that if her children were left unprotected they would be in the power of this man, whom she believed to be utterly unprincipled. Berris read the letter twice through. She thought it most selfish and encroaching of Mrs. Brown to permit such a request to be sent. Her husband could not take such a journey without a great deal of trouble and expense, to say nothing of the loss that might accrue to his own business from his absence for such a period. Besides, Berris knew that although she had called her husband stingy in small ways, he was thoroughly generous in helping others, and if he went he might be induced to promise to do things for his dying sister's children which would burden him and reduce his own power of spending for years to come. No, he must not go. She determined that he should not.

She heard him coming along the passage, and she resolved to be very self-controlled. She gave the letter to him when he came in.

"I am very sorry for your sister's illness," she said.

"I fear there is little hope," he answered sadly. "Poor dear Lucy was already broken down by a previous illness. She has never been well since her husband died."

Berris waited a few minutes; then she said:

"John, dear, you could not dream of going out to her. If she is as ill as the boy says you would not get there in time, and——"

He put out his hand as if to stop her words.

"I cannot talk about it to-night," he said. He looked at his wife, and he saw the cloud he had learned to dread gather on her face. "Will you sing to me?" he went on. "I want to drive this news out of my head till morning. Kiss me, darling, and let me hear you sing."

Berris felt defrauded, but she could not refuse; and her husband as he listened thought he had never heard her sing so indifferently.

Part VIII.

CHAPTER XVII.

A PARTING.

It was time to leave the vessel, but Berris lingered. Now that the time had come, she clung to her husband. She had begun to realize in these last few days how much more patient and indulgent he had been to her than even Molly had ever been. When he was gone she saw that she should be left without a friend. Mr. Statham's journey had been very quickly settled. A telegram urging speed had followed the letter, and he had gone into Northminster to talk about it to his old friend, Mr. Gledhow. The lawyer suggested a way out of the difficulty that had not seemed practicable to John Statham.

"Why do you not take your wife with you?" he said. "You know very well that I will look after your business and your clerks while you are away. It will really be an amusement to me."

But when Statham went home and proposed the plan to Berris, she declared that it was impossible. She had suffered so much in the short crossing

from Dover to Calais that she was sure a longer journey would kill her. "Besides," she said, "I should only be a drag on you in the way of speed. I could not travel as rapidly as you will; and my going would more than double the expense."

John Statham combated her reasons, but she remained firm, and as delay was impossible he prepared himself to go without her. Dr. Yarm had strongly seconded Mr. Gledhow's suggestion, and when Berris persisted in her refusal to accompany her husband, he promised John Statham that he would always be at his wife's service during his absence. Molly at once offered to go and stay with her sister till John Statham returned from Australia, so that really all hindrances had been taken away. The worst was over, except that which Statham most dreaded—the saying good-by to Berris. He walked away with her now to a corner of the deck, where they were hidden from observation, and he put his arm around her.

"My darling" (Berris was strongly moved by the sadness in his voice), "we must say good-by. I will be absent as short a time as possible. When we meet again we will try to be still happier than we have been, my darling." She did not answer; she bent her head so that he could not see her face, and he thought he heard a sob. "Lately," he went on, "now and again a cloud has come between us, the fault of both perhaps, or perhaps the natural effects of living together when our previous acquaintance was so limited. You must forgive

me any vexation I have given you, sweet one, and while I am away you must write me all your thoughts and wishes. When I come home we will try to be as we were in feeling on our wedding-day." She looked at him. He was too sad just then to speculate, or he would have discovered his wife's surprise. Berris had not guessed at any change in her husband's feelings; she had only found herself disappointed in him. She put her hand on his shoulder and looked up.

"You will write to me very often," she said. "Molly will be very kind, but—but she will not be you, John. I shall be so very lonely without you."

They kissed while the bell rang loudly to summon lingerers to leave the vessel. Berris found herself hurried along between Molly and Dr. Yarm till they reached the quay; then they turned and stood while the huge steamer glided gracefully through the water. Dr. Yarm and Molly waved their handkerchiefs, but when they looked round at Berris she had turned her back on the steamer, and she asked to go to the railway station. She looked so sad, so utterly downcast on the home journey, that Dr. Yarm softened toward her. He had not said so to Molly, but he had felt indignant at Mrs. Statham's refusal to go with her husband. Personally she reminded him of the coquette who had blighted his early life, and he had been inclined to think badly of her. Now he thought this evident longing for her home showed an

amount of feeling he hardly expected from her. He had prepared himself to hear her propose a visit to London, for the sake of distraction to her loneliness. He resolved not to be hard on her, although he could not yet forgive her selfishness in refusing to accompany her husband. He tried to interest her by talking about John Statham's journey. He had visited Australia during his years of wandering, and he knew the country. Berris only took a languid interest in the subject, but she liked to listen to Dr. Yarm. Her eyes glistened at his descriptions, and she even laughed at his anecdotes.

"What a faculty you have," she said. "I can quite see the places you talk about."

Molly smiled. It was rare for Berris to praise, and the gentle elder sister hoped that her engagement was forgiven.

Until they reached home Berris had not realized her loneliness. She went hurriedly to her room and locked the door, and then she began to sob violently. After a while she sat up and wiped her eyes; she shed few tears, but the hard, convulsive sobbing could not be repressed. "Molly said it was selfish of me to let him go alone," she sighed, "but I must say I think it was very selfish of him to go away and leave me all alone. I call it worse than being alone to have Molly set to watch over and take note of everything I say and do." She walked restlessly up and down the room, but she could not quiet herself. At last she went to the window.

Below in the dark garden Dr. Yarm and Molly were walking up and down in the semi-darkness. She could not distinguish the expression on their faces, but something in the way he bent over her sister, and Molly looked up at him, told of true sympathy between them.

Berris looked earnestly at them; then she stamped her foot.

"I do hate humbug," she said, "and those two promised John—I know they did, because he said so—that they would watch over me and devote themselves entirely to me. Why did they promise an impossibility? I feel and know that they can make themselves quite happy without me; then how can I feel that they are devoted to me? To think that I am left to myself for six months! It is enough to drive any one mad!"

Dr. Yarm and Molly were discussing plans for Berris' comfort and amusement.

"That brother-in-law of yours," Michael Yarm said, "is decidedly the least selfish man I have ever known. He would not talk of himself at all; his one idea was that he must tell me everything that was likely to conduce to his wife's well-being during his absence. Even at the last he said that it did not seem right to leave her, but that there was no one to care for those poor children, supposing they were left motherless. He said it was just one of those responsibilities that could not be shirked. Do you think your sister appreciates her husband?"

Molly was puzzled. Even to her dear Michael she could not discuss her sister's failings.

"Is it not very difficult to judge?" she said. "I believe sisters and brothers are not the best judges of one another. If they have lived together in childhood, they have preconceived ideas, and they rarely allow for the changes which I suppose come to all except the bigoted and narrow-minded."

Michael Yarm smiled. He felt that Molly had tacitly agreed with him.

"I shall not come over to-morrow," he said, "perhaps not till Sunday. Mrs. Statham will be best alone with you at first, poor soul. She is just one of those women who will not show how much she is feeling, and she will suffer from want of power to do so."

"She has always been reserved," Molly sighed. "She cannot help it."

"Well, I must be off." He took a loving farewell. "You will say all that is kind to Mrs. Statham, darling. Tell her I thought this first evening she would like to have you all to herself."

Instead of which Berris was disappointed to hear of his departure, and the rest of the evening passed very dismally in spite of Molly's efforts to cheer her sister.

Berris looked very gloomy when she came down to breakfast, but Molly was so gay and bright that at last her sister began to talk, and proposed a walk.

"Let us go and call on Mrs. Harrow," she said.

"She is sure to have heard that John has gone away, and she is so spiteful that she will attribute his going to any motive but the right one. So it is better to tell my own news than to wait for her spiteful condolences on my husband's desertion. Do not look shocked, Molly; you really must not lecture me. You know nothing of the world, and I am low-spirited enough without being scolded."

Molly felt secretly glad that Mrs. Harrow was not in. She thought in her sister's present state that it was much better that she should not come into collision with this woman whom she disliked. Berris had scarcely a female friend, and her sister thought it was very undesirable that she should make an enemy of Mrs. Harrow. Molly had plenty of time to think in, for her sister was silent as they came home along the country road. The weather had been very dry of late, and the road was thickly strewn with fallen leaves: but though the touch of autumn was everywhere visible, every step of the road was recalling to Berris her last walk along it, when there were still remnants of summer lingering on the hedges and on the trees. She was vividly recalling Mrs. Harrow's words about her husband. She knew very well that she had never felt the same love for John since she had learned his folly in giving up a paying case for the sake of a scruple. She lashed herself into fresh vexation as the thought came, and then she remembered her husband's parting words, and the revelation they had been to her that he too had

changed. How would it be when he came back? He had said they would begin again as they had done on their wedding-day. A look of weariness passed over the beautiful face. "It will be very nice for a few days," she thought, "but it cannot last. I am not a child now. I look at life really; this separation will have made us strangers again. At the end of a week or so I shall be as dull as ever." She paused, for she shrank from listening to the next thought that came to her. She shrank from it, but she did not resolutely cast it out, and only a few steps farther along the dry, dusty road she was telling herself that Sir Joshua was right—she had been foolishly hasty in consenting to marry a man who held a different view of life from her own. That interview with Sir Joshua had added to her consciousness of her own importance. The talk she had heard about the baronet had left an uncertain feeling in her mind with regard to the form his admiration might now take toward her; but she could no longer doubt that if Lady Hortham had died before she engaged herself to John Statham, Sir Joshua would have asked her to marry him. With all her discontent there was a certain loyalty, or it may have been a certain self-respect, in Berris' nature, which kept her from any thought of wronging her husband. She had determined that if Sir Joshua, on hearing of John Statham's absence, should write to her or call on her, she would neither answer his letter nor receive

his visit. She had always expressed herself very strongly on the subject of flirtation, and in spite of her love of admiration she had never been drawn into a scrape with one of her admirers. Mr. Gledhow's guardianship, which was a well-known fact in gossipy Northminster, had no doubt been a protection to her, but her own dignified appearance and her unhesitating haughtiness, if she suspected the slightest attempt at familiarity, had kept her free from any entanglement till the day she met John Statham. She was extremely unsusceptible. As yet she had never found any one so interesting as herself, and this was perhaps the reason why women preferred Molly to her as a friend. Berris did not consider it worth while to try to please a woman. "As time goes on," she said to herself—she had really forgotten that her sister was walking beside her, so completely had the memory of that former walk absorbed her—"we shall drift farther and farther apart. John is so sentimental; he considers married life to be a poem. To me it is just plain prose. I think those fine feelings and notions are nonsense; they are so troublesome to live up to. Poor, dear John, he should have married Molly; she has plenty of sentiment. I have seen her cry over a novel."

In the evening Mrs. Statham received a letter from her husband. She turned her back on Molly while she read it, and her sister thought that Berris was crying. Berris did not cry easily, and

she certainly was not crying over her husband's letter, though it touched her with a slight remorse for the thoughts she had cherished respecting him. It was a decided relief to find that she could not answer it. He would not be able to receive a letter from her till he reached Sydney.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WHEN JOHN COMES HOME.

MOLLY had tried hard to think only of Berris, but for all that the weeks had seemed intolerably long. John Statham had started a fortnight ago, but to Molly it seemed like three fortnights since she had seen Michael Yarm. She called him Michael now. She had overcome the awe with which he at first had inspired her; he seemed to her still a being to be worshipped as well as loved, and she gloried in noticing the weight that seemed to attach itself to his opinion. Molly had been present when Mr. Gledhow told his daughter that John Statham thought of going to Australia, and he said that he had advised Statham to consult Dr. Yarm. "His judgment is so clear," the old lawyer said; "if he agrees, then I am sure Statham ought to go to his sister."

A few days after John Statham's departure, Dr. Yarm had been summoned to Scotland, to the dying bed of an uncle whom he had not seen for years. Berris had gone out by herself. She told her sister that she preferred sometimes to be alone, while to Molly it had been like a holiday to be able to write a long letter to Michael, and to be free to dream about him as much as she pleased.

She was still thinking of him, and of the happy life that lay before them, when he came unannounced into the room. He looked so full of delight, he kissed her so rapturously, that Molly was content with the delicious silence, and did not try to break it. At last she pushed him gently away.

"I thought you did not expect to return till to-morrow?"

"Yes, but I was summoned, and I am not come to stay; only I had to pass Woolton, and I slipped in between trains. You will see me very soon, darling. The maid said her mistress was out, so I told her I would announce myself. You were not alarmed, were you, my darling?"

"I am glad Berris is out," Molly said simply. "I fancy it must try her to see us together and to feel that she is alone."

"Is she so fond of her husband?" he said absently. He was thinking of something else.

Molly looked disturbed.

"Of course she is fond of him. Why else should she have married him?"

"I see," but Dr. Yarm looked thoughtful. "I came over to-day on purpose to say something, dear girl, and I had better say it before Mrs. Statham comes back. When are you going to marry me, Molly?"

Molly smiled and blushed. "Are we not very happy as we are?" she said. "We have not been engaged very long; please wait a little."

"There must always be truth between us," he

said gravely, "and I cannot agree that the present state of things is very happy for either of us. I cannot get out here often as I could get to Northminster, and we could take care of your sister just as well married as single."

"O Michael!" She said it in such a gentle, appealing way that he kissed her. "As if I should have any time or thought for Berris then. I can see what a dear encroaching creature you are now, and how my thoughts go always straying after you. I do not know what it will be when I am with you every day. I am afraid I shall forget every one else."

"You will never forget what ought to be remembered," he said tenderly. "As to Mrs. Statham, you are bound to care for her now, I suppose, but I believe so far as her happiness is concerned she would be as happy alone. Will you marry me the day after John Statham comes back, Molly? You will not keep me waiting longer than that?"

"John said his first letter would fix the time he started on his home journey, but he did not expect to be absent more than three months."

"Then let us settle for this day three months." He kept his eyes fixed on her face as if to compel her consent.

"Do you think Friday is a nice day?" Molly was smiling. "I think it is unlucky. Why not say Tuesday—the Tuesday after John comes back?"

"Little perversity," but he said it lovingly, as he pulled out his note-book. "There, I have entered it as a professional engagement, so you cannot refuse to fulfil it. You must please say all that is kind for me to Mrs. Statham. I am afraid I must run away, dearest."

Dr. Yarm went off to see his Woolton patient, and on his way he saw Berris coming toward him with a troubled look on her fair face. She smiled, however, when she recognized him, and asked if he had been with Molly.

"I have just parted from her. You will find she has a message to give you; she has promised to marry me as soon as your husband comes back."

It seemed to Dr. Yarm that the shadow came back to Mrs. Statham's face. She frowned as she said: "We do not yet know when that will be; a good deal may happen between this and then."

She looked so strange, he thought so vexed, that he wished he had not told her, and then he remembered that Molly would be sure to do so. It was much better, therefore, that he had spoken. Even after she had left him the remembrance of her expression troubled him.

This expression was still on Mrs. Statham's face when she reached the end of Wharncliffe Street. She seemed about to turn into it, then she passed it by, and went on as if she were bound for Mrs. Harrow's house. Berris had been walking for more than an hour, striving at first against the thought that had been gaining strength in the last

few days. An intense self-pity had taken hold of her; she saw herself as if she were some one else—a beautiful, young, friendless woman, whose life had been wrecked from ignorance. She now saw clearly that she might have married into the position she coveted. She had made an irreparable mistake, and the gloom it cast over her had so deepened that when she met Dr. Yarm she felt desperate with misery. And into her terrible consciousness of self-made misery, this smiling, happy-looking man, too happy, Berris was sure, to possess any real feeling, had poured out his hope of a speedy marriage with her sister. She could hardly bear to stand talking with him for even those few minutes, so unspeakably selfish and self-centred did he seem to her, and then when she had taken leave she told herself that Dr. Yarm and Molly were sure to suit. They had both the same narrow ideas, the same faculty for making themselves happy with trifles; it was not possible they could understand her or enter into her deep feelings. When she reached the end of the street she felt that she could not go home and listen to Molly's happiness. She forgot how tired she was when she met Michael Yarm, and she walked rapidly along the broad, frost-bound road. Once more her wretchedness rose so overpoweringly that it seemed as if life was worthless unless she could free herself from its power, and then into the midst of this torture there came a new thought which seemed to grow and take fresh proportions while

she considered it. It stood out so boldly and fully in her mind that it shut from her mental sight the clinging misery of these last days. It was possible that John might not be long-lived. She wondered why she had said that the mistake of her marriage was irreparable. She believed in Providence; she had heard good people, Molly and Clara Gledhow, for instance, say that a good Providence watches over souls and bodies. Berris did not think these points out for herself; she preferred that such tiresome things as accounts and religion should be settled about for her by others.

Well, then, if she was doomed to become tired of John from his unwillingness to earn money, and his absurd scruples about clients, would it not be much better in every way if he were to die young, before they had grown to dislike one another and to be always quarrelling?

"How do you do, Mrs. Statham?"

Berris started and looked up. Mrs. Harrow was standing before her with an amused smile on her face. "You did not see me, dear. I have been calling on you, and I saw your sister. How greatly she has improved! She seems quite happy in her engagement, poor girl."

Berris looked straight at Mrs. Harrow.

"Pray do not waste your pity on Molly. I do not know any one who needs it less; my sister is perfectly happy, and she is likely to continue so."

"Very sweet of you to say so, dear, whatever you may think, but is it not wonderful how the

money always goes to those who have it, instead of to those who need it?"

Berris thought the woman's smile insolent.

"Is it so always?" she said carelessly. "I fancied that when you came in for your father's legacy you were in need of it."

Mrs. Harrow was paler than usual as she answered:

"I did not mean that. I was thinking of Sir Joshua Horsham. Have you heard of his good fortune?"

Berris felt suddenly irritable. There was a very unpleasant look in her companion's eyes.

"No," she said slowly, "I have not heard anything about him lately."

"Dear me, it is quite a romance. I saw it yesterday in the *Northminster Herald*. Lady Horsham, as you know, had very wealthy belongings; some of them are still in trade. I believe they disliked Sir Joshua and his ways, and that this Mr. Brathwaite had said he should alter his will before he heard of his niece's death. He died suddenly, however, last week, and it seems that Sir Joshua has come in for half a million."

Mrs. Harrow looked curiously at Berris as she ended, and she saw the girl's beautiful eyes glisten.

"He was already very rich, was he not?" said Berris.

"Yes, and with all his follies he seems always to have kept clear of debt. That is what I

meant when I said money always goes to those who have it."

"Yes," Berris said sadly and thoughtfully, "I suppose those are the people who know best how to use it."

She was not thinking of Mrs. Harrow as she spoke. She was telling herself that if John had ever so much money he would be sure to invest it or do something extra prudent with it, instead of using some of it for the greater enjoyment of daily life. But Mrs. Harrow, having a skeleton in the house, was apt to fancy that others were as conscious of her husband's daily increasing vice as she was. She felt sure that this impertinent beauty had meant to hint at Mr. Harrow's sottishness, and her pale eyes were full of anger as she answered Berris.

"You mean," she said, "that some people are so mean-spirited that it makes little matter to them whether they are poor or rich. They live only for those that come after them. Well, it is always pleasant to be the child of a careful person. Good-day, Mrs. Statham. I will not keep you standing in the cold; you look chilled."

She meant her words to be double-edged, as she rustled away with a slight smile on her pale, short face. It would tell against John Statham, who had lectured her husband about economy in a way she resented; it told against the improvidence of Berris' own father, who had undertaken business beyond his powers, and it also hinted at her own

father's prudence, Mrs. Harrow being one of those women—there are plenty of them about—who weight innocent-sounding words with special meanings. Berris hurried home. She had forgotten her shrinking from Molly's joyful tidings. Once more a strong tide of regret swept over her. She saw that her marriage had injured her husband's prospects as well as her own. If he had not married her, he might have met with some heiress, or at any rate with some rich girl, who would have given him all he wanted and saved him the need of working so hard, and she might have married Sir Joshua. How much good she could have done as his wife! She could have made liberal presents to Mrs. Harrow; she could also have settled such an allowance on Molly as should have made her independent of her husband; she might even have broken off the engagement. Berris thought this would have been far more convenient; it would have destroyed the chance of a *mésalliance*, which would have been very embarrassing if she had herself risen, and it would have put her sister as completely at her disposal as she had been in the old days together. Why should it not be? Why? And then her thoughts suggested that John was the only obstacle between her and her heart's desire. She was thinking so deeply that she turned mechanically up the street. The maid spoke to her when she opened the door, but Berris did not notice what the woman said. She was surprised to find Mr. Gledhow in the drawing-room.

He was looking so unnaturally grave that she turned to Molly and saw tears in her eyes.

"What is the matter with you both?" she said. "Is there anything the matter with Clara?"

"Clara is ill or she would have come over with me." Mr. Gledhow was glad to gain time. "I came for your sake, my dear, to tell you some news, some very sad news indeed, which nearly concerns you."

Berris looked again at her sister, but Molly had put her handkerchief to her eyes, and her face was hidden. Mrs. Statham felt greatly troubled.

"Have you come to tell us that the bank has failed? Have Molly and I lost our money?"

Molly left off crying. She crossed the room and stood beside her sister.

"It is much worse than that, darling," she said tenderly. "Come and sit down, dear." Then as Berris stared at her while she took the chair Molly pushed forward, she heard her sister say:

"It is not that, dearest; it is about John."

"What about him? I wish you would speak out," Berris said impatiently, and yet her voice had the nervous quiver which betrays a foreboding of evil.

Molly bent down and kissed her.

"It is very bad news, dearest," she said in a hushed tone. "Can you bear it?"

Berris bent her head; her eyes dilated with a strange look of horror rather than of fear.

"There was news of a shipwreck," Molly went

on. "Mr. Gledhow knew it some days ago, but to-day it is confirmed. As yet, it is supposed that every soul on board the *Eureka* is lost."

Berris had become very pale, but she sat upright and looked calmly at Mr. Gledhow.

"It cannot be certain yet, can it?" she said. "People sometimes come back when hope is given up."

There was a craving anxiety in her eyes, and Mr. Gledhow shrank from them. He felt that there was little ground for hope.

"In this case, my dear child, it is better not to hope. The steamer must have been wrecked so near home that the news of there being survivors would have come as quickly as the news of the wreck. I should have waited still longer if I had been able to hope."

"Ah!" She rose from her chair and moved slowly to the door. Mr. Gledhow and Molly stood looking after her, awed by the statue-like way in which she had received the news. Mr. Gledhow was the first to speak.

"You should go after her," he said. "The poor dear girl should not be left to herself in a grief like this."

He spoke more roughly than usual, for he thought Molly was supine.

"I will go presently," Molly said. "She will be better alone just at first."

Part IX.

CHAPTER XIX.

REMORSE.

WHEN Molly went to her sister's door, her knock was not answered. She listened, but there was no sound; and in fear lest Berris should have fainted, she tried to open the door. It was fastened, and in her alarm Molly shook it in the hope of rousing her sister to consciousness.

"Berris, Berris, let me in!" she cried.

"There is nothing the matter," Berris answered, "but I wish to be left alone."

She was standing in the middle of her room. She looked more like a beautiful statue than a flesh-and-blood woman. She grew each moment colder and paler. Her first sensation, as she listened to Mr. Gledhow's news, had been a feeling of release, but at last, as if by a sudden flash of mental light, her self-conceit fell from her like a thrown-off cloak, and she saw herself without disguise; now she saw clearly her murderous thought about her husband. Involuntarily her hands stretched themselves forward to shield herself from the sight;

she shrank back with bowed head from its horror. Was she a murderess, and when she died should she be judged for her thoughts as for a crime committed? It was at this point that Molly tried the door. Berris longed to admit her sister, she longed to escape from the overmastering dread, but it held her firmly; she could not shut her eyes to the consciousness of what she had wished for. Her hair rose on her forehead, and the chill feeling in her blood seemed to stiffen her, though she was wrapped in a fur-lined cloak, her husband's last gift before they parted. She shivered violently. If she had sinned past all hope of pardon, it would be better to die at once; she could never enjoy life again with this horrible feeling clinging to her till it blotted out all else. For she knew that although it was sin, she did not wish that her husband had not died. In the midst of her despair she seemed to hear a whisper bidding her seek help in prayer. Yes, Molly would tell her what to do to get some relief from the intolerable weight that was crushing her.

She turned to go to the door; then she shrank back. How could she bare her inner self to her sister? She well knew the shock it would be to her sister to learn that Berris even blamed her husband; she dared not tell her how wicked she had been. In that moment truth was making itself felt, and Berris knew that if she asked advice of Molly she should have to confess the simple fact without any of the softening that would have les-

sened the offence in her sister's eyes. No, she could not tell her, and then she heard Molly's steps going away to the staircase. Berris sighed with relief, and wondered how she could have dreamed of such a confession.

She stood grasping the brass rail at the foot of her bed till the continued strain hurt her strong, slender fingers. That last thought had held something in it; something worth listening to if she could only follow it. She vaguely remembered that her husband had one day said that the best way to recall an idea was to go back to that which had suggested it. She unclasped her hands from the rail, and stood still and statue-like as she had stood when Molly turned the door-handle. What had she thought about? The answer came at once: she had thought of asking advice, and then had shrunk from the confession she should have had to make. For some time she could not see farther. Even for a moment or two a faint whisper suggested the relief that must come if she gave her burden into Molly's keeping; but Berris closed her ears—she would not listen, and she strained her reflecting power to find the clew she had lost. It came at last, as suddenly as the consciousness of her sin had revealed itself. Unless she betrayed herself, who could know that she had ever cherished such a thought? Her heart gave a bound of relief as the strong light of consciousness again grew dim before the specious arguments that came back like a flood to ease her burdened heart. Just now she

had wished to kneel down and ask for help and pardon, her sin had seemed so black and deadly. Now her lovely lips curled into a smile at the thought of her own exaggeration.

"My sorrow has turned my brain," she said, "as if I could have wished the dear, kind fellow's death! I am making myself out a monster."

She sat down. She began to think of John. Poor, dear fellow! She hoped he had not suffered, and she shuddered once more as she thought of drowning and struggling in the water. It was horrible—death was horrible; but a painful death like that was too dreadful. It was too painful to think of. He would never be found, she thought, or have a decent funeral—he, poor fellow, who had cared so much for order. Poor, dear John, how fond he was of her! She forced herself to think of him until at last tears came; they rarely came to Berris, and when they did she suffered greatly from the effort. Crying was not to her the luxury that it seemed to be to some women. But she had never cried like this; her tears came stormily with the violence of a thunder-shower, and when they ceased she felt faint and completely exhausted. After a while she wrote a few lines to Molly, asking to be left alone and asking Mr. Gledhow to excuse her from coming down that evening, and then she rang and ordered the maid to light a fire in her room; not so much for warmth as for refuge from the singular terror that made her shrink from the dark corners of the room. In those dark

corners she fancied she saw her husband's face. Once as she raised her eyes she saw him plainly, and she cried out. It was not a loud cry, but watchful Molly heard it; she had left Mr. Gledhow to dine alone, and had spent most of her time wandering up and down stairs, making long pauses outside her sister's room, listening anxiously for any sound. This cry, faint but so full of agony, drew Molly swiftly from the end of the passage to the door, which Berris had forgotten to lock after the maid went away.

Molly's eyes opened widely at what she saw. Berris sat crouching in an easy-chair; her eyes stared wildly, and she stretched out one hand as if to keep Molly away. Molly did not ask questions; she put both arms fondly round her sister, and in a moment she felt that Berris caught her with a strong grasp, while loud sobs burst from her.

"My poor darling," Molly whispered tenderly; "there, there, dear," as she placed another chair, and then raised her sister's feet to it. "You are faint," she said after a silent pause; "I will leave you just a minute while I fetch you something."

But Berris caught at her gown.

"Do not go, Molly," she pleaded; "you must not leave me, indeed you must not; I shall die if I am left alone."

Molly rang the bell. She had left Mr. Gledhow just beginning his dinner, and when she had persuaded Berris to swallow the soup and wine she had sent for, she had the comfort of seeing that

she became calmer. She still followed Molly's movements with an anxious, strained look, and when her sister came and sat down by her, while the maid was clearing the little table, Berris said:

"You will stay here, Molly—you will not go away again? I feel so strange!"

"I will stay here," Molly said, and she told the maid to send what she wanted for the night to Mrs. Statham's room.

"Yes, ma'am," and then the maid asked if Miss Bedale was not coming down to dinner.

Molly saw a look of dread in her sister's eyes, and she determined not to leave her. She sat holding her hand, for Berris said she could not go to bed; she was sure she should only lie awake. She seemed pleased when her sister offered to read to her, and she leaned back in her chair with closed eyes.

Molly read on and on, till a slight sound reached her. She looked at Berris and saw that she had fallen asleep.

Molly passed a troubled night, but Berris slept as peacefully as a healthy child does. She was still asleep when Molly came up from breakfast, but she soon roused. She had forgotten her trouble, for when she opened her eyes and saw Molly standing beside her chair, she smiled.

"The doctor has come to see you," Molly said. "Shall he come up here, or will you see him downstairs?"

"I will dress my hair first," Berris answered,

and though her sad expression told Molly that the memory of her trouble had come back, the look of horror, that had so alarmed the tender sister, had left Mrs. Statham's eyes.

"I need not trouble you, Molly," Berris said. "You go down and tell Michael I will see him as soon as I have breakfasted."

She rang the bell as she spoke, and Molly went downstairs. Mr. Gledhow had gone back to Northminster, and she found Dr. Yarm alone.

"She is ever so much better," Molly said. "The terrible look that frightened me so last night has gone from her eyes, but I am glad I sent for you, darling."

Dr. Yarm smiled as he drew her to him.

"I am inclined to think," he said, "that you are also in need of care. Dear girl, you look as if you had been up all night. I shall prescribe a walk with me in the garden while Mrs. Statham is breakfasting."

In the garden he added:

"I do not fancy you need feel anxious about Mrs. Statham. She has strong feelings, and of course the sudden shock greatly upset her at the time; but I think she will get over it more quickly than you expect. She is not sensitive, and I fancy she knows how to take care of herself. Do not look unhappy, Molly. I am very sorry for her; but I do not want you to worry yourself, your dear self, without cause."

CHAPTER XX.

WIDOWHOOD.

BERRIS had been less than two months widowed, when a letter came to her from Sir Joshua Horsham. At first she shrank from opening it. It seemed to renew the shuddering terror of that evening when the news of her loss reached her, and then she thought herself fanciful. The note was probably only a formal expression of sympathy; she broke the coat of arms which formed the seal. The note was a labored expression of condolence, and it went on to suggest that the writer and Mrs. Statham had now the power of sympathizing with one another; both having suffered a like bereavement. Would not Mrs. Statham permit the writer to call on her, so that he might try to add his mite of comfort, in her trial? It was all so formal and so commonplace, that Berris gave a shiver of disgust, and flung the letter in the fire.

She asked herself indignantly, how she could ever have tolerated this man, or given him a place in her thoughts. He could have no real feeling for either his dead wife or for her sorrow, to wish to intrude on her at such a time. It seemed to

her that silence, in such a case, would give consent, and when Molly came in from her walk, she asked her if she would write to Sir Joshua Horsham. Molly looked greatly surprised, but when Berris explained, she agreed that it was the only thing to be done, and she did it.

“You are so strait-laced, dear, that I am half afraid of asking you.” Berris looked so pathetic, that her sister felt she could not refuse her anything: “I want you not to mention this to Dr. Yarm.”

“It would be quite safe with him,” Molly said, gravely. She felt that she ought to tell Michael she had written to Sir Joshua.

“I know that, but this is my business, not yours, Molly. My dear, you know so little about men, you can’t fancy how suspicious they are. Dr. Yarm is very good, but he is like other men, and he would at once imagine there had been something between me and Sir Joshua.”

Molly’s shocked face vexed her sister.

“I do not say he would think any harm of me, you silly child,” she said angrily; “of course not; but why should any one but you and I know this? I have burned his note, and I intend to forget that I received it, and you can forget too, if you try Molly; there! do not ever speak of it again.”

The winter passed dully enough for Mrs. Statham. The days went slowly by; the only change in them was caused by the visits of Dr. Yarm, which were of little interest to Berris.

So many weeks had passed, that April, with its sparkling showers and its exquisite sunshine, had nearly run its course. Dr. Yarm had been obliged to confess himself mistaken in his estimate of Mrs. Statham's grief. Her sorrow was so quiet, and it seemed so lasting. She took a daily walk, and sometimes she went to church with Molly; but she declined to see visitors, and refused Clara Gledhow's pressing invitations to stay at Northminster. Miss Gledhow was instigated to repeat these invitations by Dr. Yarm, who wished to have Molly nearer him than she was at Woolton. She said she could not marry him while Berris continued so sad; and it must be owned that Mrs. Statham preferred to have her sister with her, and had not said a word about Molly's wedding, though she must have known that the time fixed for it had long since gone by.

Michael Yarm was growing very impatient. He told Molly that she ought to listen to him, if it were only from a regard to human life; for the thought of her distracted his mind when it ought to have been fixed on his patients.

"One of these fine days I shall write a wrong prescription," he said. "Some one will be poisoned, and the fault will lie at your door."

"Then, after we are married, you will leave off thinking about me, I suppose," Molly said saucily.

"Of course you will not be another person then, you will be a part of me."

Molly shook her head at him, and promised to

think it over. She thought if she could only bring herself to suggest the idea to Berris, perhaps she might not object; but there remained the difficulty of knowing what to do with her widowed sister while she and Michael went for a wedding journey. It seemed to Molly that the wedding itself would be very trying for poor Berris.

"Let us be patient," she said to her lover. "We have only got to be patient, and some way out of the delay will be shown us."

Michael Yarm did not answer directly, but he decided that he had waited long enough, both for himself and for Molly, and he began to see that the only way out of the dilemma was to find a pleasant home for Berris.

He did not think that Molly was necessary to her sister's happiness. She was a comfort to her, without doubt, and also very useful; for he observed that his Molly always had something to do for "poor dear Berris," and he determined to end this species of slavery, and to take possession of his wife.

Berris had become more reserved than ever, or Michael Yarm might have discovered that she was growing very tired of her present mode of life. She was too jealous of interference to give up the housekeeping to Molly, and yet she resented the trouble of ordering dinner, and all domestic troubles. She liked to sit in a sort of aimless revery, or else to take long, solitary walks over the distant moors. Spring was stirring in

her, and although she still grieved for the loss of her husband, she loathed the sight of her heavy, crape-covered gowns and the deeply veiled bonnet which Molly had chosen for her.

She now stood watching Dr. Yarm and her sister in the garden, hidden from their observation by her window-curtain, and she stamped her foot with impatience as she saw him bend over Molly, and saw, too, the look of tender happiness in the girl's face.

"Why is she to have everything she wants," she said angrily, "while I have to part from everything I value?"

At dinner-time she said pleasantly to Dr. Yarm: "Do you think you could spare Molly for a few weeks? I long to go to the sea. I have never stayed at the sea since I was quite little; and I was sent to an old friend of my father's at Sidmouth."

"This is not the best time of the year for the sea, but I dare say it is nice at Sidmouth. Does your old friend still live there?"

"Yes, I had a letter from her in the winter."

Berris sighed. The old friend had written a letter of condolence about Mrs. Statham's bereavement, and had asked Berris to let her be of some use to the child of her old friend.

"Ah!" Dr. Yarm fancied he saw a way out of his difficulty. "I have no doubt she would be glad to see you again."

It did not take long to persuade Berris that it

would be more complete change to her if she went alone to stay with Mrs. Vere, and Dr. Yarm found Miss Gledhow willing to persuade Molly that it was her duty to go and stay with her old friends at Northminster. He secretly resolved that the sisters should not meet again till a time had been fixed for his marriage with Molly.

CHAPTER XXI.

IN DEVONSHIRE.

MR. GLEDHOW had offered to escort Berris as far as Seaton, and Mrs. Vere sent her servant to meet her there and bring her over to Branscombe. This drive delighted Berris; she had never seen anything so lovely, she thought, as these hedge-bordered roads with flowery banks below, and now and then a row of wind-swept trees bent and twisted in a way that made it easy to guess on which side lay the sea. Soon after leaving Seaton she had seen the sea every now and then, when clefts came in the cliffs that for some time bordered the road; but when she reached Branscombe she gave a cry of delight at the sight of the little gray village nestling under a green down—the cottages parted by a brook that flowed down from the hills through the middle of the street, and then across a stretch of flowery meadows, with many a winding curve and pleasant, shaded pool, where now and then a tree leaned over it to the Combe mouth. This opened to show a triangle of blue sea and an expanse of yellow sand between the soft green of the lofty cliff that guarded it.

Mrs. Vere was not related to the Bedales, but

their mother had always taught Molly and Berris to call her friend aunt when they wrote to thank her for Christmas gifts. Except for the visit paid by Berris in childhood, they had had no personal intercourse with Mrs. Vere, and for some years past the letters had been rare on either side.

The carriage stopped before a long, low house, almost hidden by climbing plants and roses already covered with buds. Mrs. Vere stood under the porch ready to welcome her visitor, looking, Berris thought, exactly as she had looked when they had parted all those years ago. It made the girl feel child-like again, as she seemed to hear her father saying, when he came to fetch her, "Are you glad or sorry to go home again?" and she had said, "Sorry," because she had thought it was more polite to Mrs. Vere. Berris smiled, as she remembered how very tired she had grown of her visit, because Mrs. Vere would not let her go down to the sea by herself, and she wondered whether she should now find the dulness unbearable.

Mrs. Vere kissed her gently on both cheeks, and led her into the pretty drawing-room, which looked much smaller than Berris remembered it. She looked round it, and saw that it was not changed, at least not so far as her memory served her, and then she turned to look at her hostess. There was no doubt that Mrs. Vere appeared younger rather than older. Her gray hair was replaced by sunny brown locks, her face was free from lines, and her teeth showed brilliantly between her thin red lips.

Berris understood, as she looked, how the change had been effected, and she could not help seeing that the expression had also changed. The simple face had far more meaning in it, but it was now artificial, and was far from inspiring trust or confidence. Still, Mrs. Statham thought that Mrs. Vere would probably prove less dull than she had been in her dowdy days, and would be more likely to sympathize with her visitor's tastes.

Simple people, Berris thought, were usually simpletons. If Molly had not been her own sister, she knew that she should be tempted to rank her as a fool.

Mrs. Vere made a great fuss about the change in Berris, and presently she gave her beautiful visitor tea. "I hope, dear, that you do not mean to shut yourself up," she said. "I have some charming friends in Sidmouth, and they wish to make your acquaintance."

Mrs. Statham thought before she answered.

"I have not gone anywhere, or seen any one yet," she said, "but I need not make you dull."

"Dulness is so bad for the spirits, dear child," Mrs. Vere sighed. She longed to show off this beautiful creature to her Sidmouth friends. "I look at these things from a hygienic point of view, Berris, dear, and I really think you should go out."

There was a sudden rustling sound, and Berris exclaimed: "Oh, you sweet! What a darling, beautiful creature!"

"Behave yourself, Blanche." Mrs. Vere put her hand on the collar of a graceful white greyhound which had come in by one of the half-open French windows to make friends with Berris, but the dog broke impatiently away from its mistress and continued the cries of welcome with which it had received the visitor, as it put its paws on her knee and looked up in her face.

"Do you like dogs?" said Mrs. Vere.

"I love them, but Molly never would let me have one. Poor John was trying to get me one just before he went away. It is not easy to get exactly the dog you want—at least, he did not find it easy."

"Poor fellow! How hard it must have been for him to leave such a creature as you have grown into, Berris!"

"Yes. I had rather not talk about it, please."

Berris rose and went to the window, but she spoke in a very decided tone.

"Poor darling!" Mrs. Vere said softly. "If it is fine we will drive in to Sidmouth to-morrow. We have to settle beforehand," she added, "because there are no vehicles to be had in Branscombe, and my donkey-chair would not suit you, Berris."

Berris protested her willingness to drive the donkey-chair, but Mrs. Vere remained firm. She was secretly looking forward to a triumphal entry into Sidmouth with this beautiful woman, and she meant her to appear to advantage.

The drive next day was delightful, though, to Mrs. Statham's sorrow, Blanche was not allowed to accompany them, and they heard her despairing howls as they drove away. It took some time to drive through the long, straggling village, with its quaint old church at the farther end of the long hedge-bordered road. On the left were constant glimpses of the sun-bathed sea, on the right was an upland of green corn-fields quivering in the brilliant light, and over all the lark was pouring out his song, a tiny brown speck against the tender blue sky.

"This is what I like," Berris said. "I could go on all day enjoying myself in this way."

Mrs. Vere listened with apparent delight to her lovely companion, but she did not agree with her. At this moment the sun was making her head ache, and was, she felt sure, fading the flowers in her very juvenile bonnet. She was excited with her pride in Mrs. Statham's beauty; she could not have imagined that the half-formed, silent child would have developed into such a splendid creature. She felt sure that some of the Sidmouth people whose acquaintance she wished for, but who had hitherto kept out of her way, would at once seek to be introduced to her attractive companion, and she told herself, as they drove through the charming little village of Salcombe, that in this case virtue would bring its own reward; for she had at first shrunk from the visit of a sorrowing widow when Berris had written to propose her-

self; she had been tempted to say she was engaged.

Before they reached the hotel, Mrs. Vere had been greeted by some acquaintances, and Berris decided that unless some one more interesting than this sample appeared on the scene, she should confine her attention to the beauty of Sidmouth, and should decline to form any new acquaintances. There is no use in describing the scene that had met her eyes when she came in sight of the bay. Every one knows Sidmouth, but in this glorious sunshine it seemed to sparkle with loveliness. Berris had never seen anything so exquisite as the contrast between the deep green of the stone pines growing almost down to the sands, and the rich sapphire and emerald of the sea under the burning, cloudless sky. The picturesque rocks glowed a yet deeper red, the sails and rigging of a fishing-boat were a vivid brown as it passed slowly across the bay, while a group of urchins bathing and frolicking on the right of the picture were as pink as a bed of carnations.

Berris took in all this as she stood on the hotel balcony while Mrs. Vere was ordering lunch and gathering the news of arrivals.

"It is not the right time of year, dear," she said when she came up to Mrs. Statham, "but I notice that the most distinguished visitors come to Sidmouth out of the regular season; people who really come for rest prefer to find a place rather empty. What shall we do? Will you take a turn before

lunch? I know where to find a shady spot. Shall we go?"

Berris smiled, but she felt bored.

"It is so very pleasant here that I should like to watch the boats, unless you wish to walk."

"Not at all; do just as you please." Mrs. Vere was greatly disappointed, but she promised herself the triumph of exhibiting Mrs. Statham to her friends in the afternoon. She took up the local paper and turned to the hotel column.

"The place seems very empty," she said, "but there are a few people staying here, chiefly in lodgings, I fancy."

Berris did not turn her head. The sea had completely fascinated her with its strange magic; she wished Mrs. Vere lived here, where she could always see the sea from the window. At Branscombe she could only get a distant view of it a mile away. It was glorious to sit feasting her eyes on its ever-changing beauty. The sight gratified two of her strongest feelings—her love of color and her hatred of restraint. While she sat looking at the sea the wind rose, and the exquisite sapphire-like blue changed to a tawny green, on which long foam-streaks came riding swiftly to shore. The girl's eyes sparkled and her cheeks glowed with the enthusiasm of her delight. She felt exquisite pleasure in watching this wild, fetterless creature—for it seemed to Berris a living, irresistible creature, free to work its will as it pleased. If Clara Gledhow had been beside her,

reminding her of the inexorable law of ebb and flow, Berris would not have listened. At that moment she was ready to make a fetish of the sea; she believed it to be omnipotent.

"Dear me! there is some one from Yorkshire staying here." Mrs. Vere's thin voice broke the enchanted spell that held Berris bound. She turned, impatient of the interruption, eager to go back to her enthusiastic gazing.

Her companion was startled by the glorified beauty of the young widow's face. She sighed with a little envy.

"My dear, you look beautiful. I believe the change has done you good already." Then in a pitying tone: "I fancy your mother did not visit the country people, did she? but you may have heard of this Sir Joshua Horsham; I see he comes from Edgerley Manor-house, near Northminster."

"Sir Joshua is a friend of mine," Berris said haughtily, and then she could have bitten her tongue with anger at her own folly. She had already discovered Mrs. Vere's craving to know titled people, and she felt sure she would want to be introduced to a live baronet.

"Really! you surprise me. Then of course you'll leave your card for him, won't you, Berris?"

Mrs. Vere was trembling with eagerness; she could hardly believe that this lift in her life should come to her through one of those poor Bedale girls. Then as she looked at Berris, she thought that she was distinguished enough to visit any one.

Mrs. Vere's excitement roused her companion's scorn. Berris smiled with some contempt as she answered :

"Well, no, a lady does not usually leave her card on a gentleman, does she? It is the other way, I fancy. If Sir Joshua wants to see me, he can easily find out where I am staying."

"Do you mean," Mrs. Vere gasped with excitement, "that he will come over and call on you?"

"Probably."

Berris spoke stiffly ; she was annoyed, and it was a relief when the waiter told Mrs. Vere that luncheon was served in a private sitting-room.

Part X.

CHAPTER XXII.

A VISITOR.

WHILE they were driving home Mrs. Statham wished herself back at Woolton. Hitherto she had found her companion commonplace and empty-headed, but Mrs. Vere had now become silly and garrulous. There was a half-suppressed excitement about her which puzzled the young widow, and made her thankful to escape to her own room. After lunch Mrs. Statham went back to the window to look at the sea. Mrs. Vere decided that Sir Joshua's visit must not be left to chance. She went into the coffee-room again, and asked for the visitors' book. In this she entered her own and Mrs. Statham's name and address, and she bade the waiter tell Sir Joshua Horsham of their visit to Sidmouth. She then proceeded to question the man about the baronet. She learned that Sir Joshua had come into Devonshire to see some property he had lately come into. He had been at Exeter seeing the agent of his newly acquired property. One might have supposed that the

waiter was a confidant of Sir Joshua's—he was so fully acquainted with the baronet's movements. Sir Joshua Horsham had come over to Sidmouth to see a friend, a sick gentleman in one of the best lodgings in the place. Sir Joshua was not much at Sidmouth. Oh dear, no! He came and went; was away to-day, might be back to-morrow, perhaps to-night; but he, the waiter, would certainly give the lady's message; and he pocketed with an oily smile the tip she gave him. The consciousness of her secret, and the daring hope that Sir Joshua Horsham might come out to call on her beautiful visitor, had excited Mrs. Vere beyond her power of self-control.

At dinner she began again, and reproached Berris for having refused to be introduced to her Sidmouth friends.

"I told you I had not been anywhere or seen any one," said Berris, smiling; "and I am sure your smart friends would have found me very dull. I never want to visit, you know. Molly is far more sociable than I am."

Mrs. Vere shook her head.

"I can't think it's right for a lovely young creature like you to shut herself up and mope. I'm sure your husband, poor fellow, would have said the same."

Berris was silent. She looked repressive, and she did not speak again during dinner.

She could not have told why her companion's words had so greatly jarred her. She wondered

if it was because they had ignorantly recalled that idea of John's which had always vexed her, his wish that she would like other women and make friends of them; and when she had answered that she preferred men to women he had looked grave, and had told her that it was safest and best in every way for a woman to make friends of her own sex while she was still young. Berris considered that all young women were jealous of her beauty, and therefore were always prejudiced against her. She thought that was the reason why Molly was liked better than she was. Women were not afraid of being eclipsed by her. She heard that Mrs. Vere was keeping up a little buzz of talk, but she did not gather in the sense of the words. It was a relief to her when the dinner ended. Mrs. Vere's perpetual babble about people and things she had never seen or heard of was beginning to irritate her past all her efforts at self-control.

Mrs. Vere's babble had been about fashion and society papers, and she was amazed at Mrs. Statham's indifference to such delightful subjects. She went on afresh when she and her guest were in the drawing-room.

"Ah! yes, dear; when you are out of mourning again—and nowadays a year is ample—your interest in life will come back. I assure you I was as dull as ditch-water before I took in a society paper. It has taught me so much. I consider it quite an education for a woman."

"Do you, really?" Berris said; and she sat down to the pianoforte.

Mrs. Vere did not care for music. She wanted to question Berris about Sir Joshua Horsham, and she stifled several yawns while she listened. Berris had chosen a song that had been a favorite with John Statham, and while she sang it had vividly recalled him. She gave a long, shivering sigh as she ended, and next minute she dashed into a brilliant mazourka which pleased Mrs. Vere far more than the song had done.

"I will say good-night," Berris said, as she rose abruptly. "I fancy sea-air makes one extra sleepy."

Mrs. Vere wished to accompany her to her room, but Berris would not hear of it. Her hostess had stayed chatting for half an hour on the previous evening, while she recounted the faults of her cook and the stingy ways of the vicar's wife.

The next day proved rainy, but Mrs. Vere's excitement had calmed down, and Berris was left to spend her morning as she chose. She borrowed a huge rain-cloak, rebelling against the need of protecting her crape, and sheltered by a large umbrella she took the long way along the road to the sea. She wanted to get away from Mrs. Vere and to consider her position. She felt certain that Sir Joshua was in love with her, and he was not a likely man to cease his pursuit of her unless she gave him a decided refusal. He would probably find her out at Branscombe. Well, then, what

answer should she make him if he asked her to become his wife? It was, of course, in her power to see him only in Mrs. Vere's presence, or she might refuse to see him at all. Berris stood still as this thought came. The rain had somewhat lessened, but the wind blowing freshly from the sea sent her golden hair into her eyes; while the greyhound, which had followed her, frolicked round her, barking furiously. She hurried on till she reached one of the tall green cliffs that guard the mouth of the Combe. This gave her shelter from the wind, and she gasped with relief as she pushed the golden wisps of hair out of her eyes and soothed the dog into silence. After a while she tried to make her way to the sea, which was still at some little distance, but the wind and the dash of spray were too wild even for her, and she soon turned to go home again. The walk had, however, braced her nerves. She resolved as she walked home that if Sir Joshua came she would see him. She could decide later on whether she would become Lady Horsham.

She could walk far more quickly now that she did not face the wind and the blinding rain. She was too much wrapped in thought to notice the dog as it ran on in front and turned now and then to see that she was following it.

A village boy stood holding a horse in front of Mrs. Vere's garden gate. He touched his cap when he saw the tall lady coming toward him. Berris smiled with satisfaction, and yet she shrank

from what she felt lay before her. She had not thought it would come so soon.

The maid was already at the open door, bristling with importance as she gave her message.

"If you please, ma'am, I was to give you this card. The gentleman is in the drawing-room."

"Is he alone?" Mrs. Statham asked.

"Mistress is there, ma'am. I was to ask you to go in straight."

Berris gave the woman her cloak, and then she went slowly upstairs to change her wet boots and to put her hair straight. It amused her that Mrs. Vere should imagine she would hurry in like an excited school-girl to welcome Sir Joshua.

Her walk had doubled the lovely bloom on her cheeks and the brightness of her eyes, and in spite of her deep mourning dress Sir Joshua thought she looked handsomer than ever. He had risen at the sound of her footsteps, and he met her at the door as she opened it. Her grand beauty so dazzled him that it impressed his manner with a tinge of almost reverence. This pleased Berris, and restored her self-respect, which had suffered a shock at hearing that Sir Joshua was with Mrs. Vere. Her pride would not allow her to be ashamed of her friend, but she feared Mrs. Vere might have said something indiscreet—something that would make this bold man presume on her own desolate position.

"There is no need to ask how this air suits you," he said. "I never saw you look so well."

Berris smiled slightly. "I am quite well, thank you," she said indifferently.

She resolved that he should not think she was flattered by his visit, and also that Mrs. Vere should not leave the room. Mrs. Vere had no such intention. This was the first time she had received a visit from a baronet, and she was still fluttered and excited. She was eager to tell Berris that she had visited at Bernshaw, the house on Sir Joshua's new property, in the lifetime of its former owner; but Mrs. Statham seemed wholly unconcerned by her information. Berris knew that Sir Joshua was studying her face, and she was wholly unwilling that he should consider she was interested in his increase of income.

"Ah!" she said carelessly; "he was related to Lady Horsham, I fancy."

Sir Joshua was puzzled. He did not believe in Mrs. Statham's indifference. He had not forgotten how she had listened to him when they met in Woolton; and that had been risky listening, for her husband was then living. She was only coquetting, he thought, but she would not keep it up. He turned to Mrs. Vere and said he hoped to have the pleasure of seeing her at Bernshaw.

"I shall have to furnish the place, even if I decide on letting it," he said; "it is too old a house to leave empty for months together, and I have already two houses in the North."

"Have you, really?" Mrs. Vere had rarely felt so happy. She seemed to swell with exultation,

and then she looked at Berris and wondered at her listless indifference toward this rich man. The slight swagger in his voice and manner, and his tall, portly figure, had greatly impressed his hostess; and now as she looked from him to Berris the sudden idea came to her that they would make a splendid pair. She did not think Sir Joshua handsome, but she thought looks did not matter in a man, especially in a man rich enough to possess three country-houses—that surely made up for everything. Mrs. Vere had been romantic in her young days, but she had broken an engagement with a poor man to marry a rich one. Since she had taken to the study of society papers she had grown to consider love a mere sentiment—charming to read about in a novel, but completely out of place in anything so business-like as marriage. It seemed to her, however, that all men were sure to fall in love with Berris at first sight. There was no doubt but that the baronet would wish to marry her.

Her own course was plain. If she helped him in his suit he would be forever bound to her, and she should find herself lifted above those petty snubs and vexations which had formed the chief troubles of her uneventful life. It was a grand opportunity.

She presently asked her visitor to stay to lunch, and for an instant Sir Joshua was tempted to accept the invitation; but a glance at the young widow's impassive face decided him to pretext an

engagement in Sidmouth. He would humor her caprices, he thought.

"May I come some other day?" he said then to Berris. "Are you staying here much longer?"

Berris smiled.

"As I have only been here a couple of days I do not think Mrs. Vere is in a hurry to lose me. She is so kind as to wish me to stay some time." She gave a bright laugh as she ended. She felt suddenly more like her old self than she had felt since her husband's death. It was so long since a man had spoken to her with such admiring eyes. Sir Joshua noticed the change, and it strengthened his hope of success. He was always confident with women, but something about Mrs. Statham lessened this confidence. He had rarely been fascinated as he was by her. Her beauty and her distinction, added to this reserved hauteur, which seemed to him to have increased since her widowhood, made her altogether irresistible to the inflammable baronet.

He turned to Mrs. Vere and asked permission to come over in two days' time and drive her and her young friend to Beer. Might he come in the morning? They could lunch at Beer, he said, as there was an inn there. Mrs. Vere gave a gracious assent. It is possible that if he had asked her to crawl down to the sea on her hands and knees she would have done it. She bridled and smiled with delight.

"Do you hear, dear?" she said to Berris, but Sir Joshua was too quick for her.

"May I hope," he said in a low voice, "that you drive with me? It will be very kind of you."

Berris had made up her mind. She had not decided to accept Sir Joshua should he ask her to marry him, but there was no reason why she should not take all the amusement that came in her way. She had dreaded and shrunk from Sir Joshua's introduction to Mrs. Vere, but that was accomplished. She left the rest to fate. She would enjoy herself as much as she could.

She gave him a winning smile.

"It will be very pleasant," she said. "I have heard of Beer, and I want to see it."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE HOUSE AT COLSTON.

A FORTNIGHT later Molly was sitting sewing in the room she had lived in with Berris at the old lodgings. The time of her marriage was settled, and the Gledhows had asked her to give up the lodging and spend the coming month with them; but Molly said frankly that she preferred to be alone, though she promised to see her friend Clara very frequently in the interval. Molly had old-fashioned ideas about marriage. It seemed to her that it was a very solemn charge to take another person's happiness into her keeping. She had tried to share this idea with Berris before her marriage with John Statham, but Berris had laughed and begged her not to be "goody-goody." Molly had more color than she used to have, though she looked thin. Love had given a new expression to her dark eyes, and they looked very attractive as she raised them from her work. She folded it and put it away; she was going to write to Berris. Dr. Yarm had said there was no need to hurry in telling Mrs. Statham that they had settled to be married in a month, but for once Molly did not agree with him. She thought it

was kinder and more sisterly to take it for granted that Berris sympathized in her happiness. She felt, however, that it would be a trial to her sister to be present, and she said so, assuring her that both she and Michael would not feel slighted if Berris declined to be present at their marriage. It was not an easy letter to write, but Molly's unassuming frankness, and her care to respect her sister's feelings, brought her successfully through it. She, however, felt timid about the letter's fitness, and she resolved to show it to Michael before she posted it. She usually met him at the Gledhows'. He sometimes called for her and took her on there. She had not expected him to-day, and she was surprised when the maid announced him.

He looked so full of happiness that she said: "You have good news. I am sure you have."

"Well, yes, my darling." He kissed her again, but he looked suddenly grave. "I have just had a lesson against taking dislikes. You know I said I wanted our new house to be as far as possible away from Edgerley, but I did not tell you that was because I disliked Sir Joshua Horsham. I fancied he shared the feeling, and would certainly not raise a finger to help me. I have just seen Gledhow. He sent for me this morning, but I could not get away sooner. You know that charming old house at Colston, close to Northminster?" he added, as Molly opened her eyes in wonder. "Well, Davey has an excellent practice there—has a good many Northminster patients, I

hear—but, poor chap, he has just been told if he wishes to keep his wife alive she must not spend another winter in the North. Well, the long and the short of it is that Sir Joshua has found a practice—he has purchased it, I fancy—for Davey, somewhere near his new property in the South; and he writes to Gledhow, telling him that if I choose I may walk into the Colston practice, house and all, at a comparatively trifling outlay. What do you say to that, dear girl? Will the old house do as well as the cottage you had thought of?”

“Oh, Michael!”—Molly clasped her hands in a kind of ecstasy—“it is too good! But”—her tone grew timid—“isn’t it too grand for us? Shall I be able to manage a house like that? I know that it is not too good for you, dearest.”

She laid her head on his shoulder with a little thankful sob. Deep down in her heart Molly had felt a misgiving of selfishness ever since she had been engaged to Michael Yarm. She had one day hinted to him that he was making a great sacrifice in marrying her, because she had no power to help him back to the position in which he had been born. He had looked at her very gravely, and he had told her to dismiss the thought and to forget it.

“Comfort yourself with the certainty that I never knew real happiness till you became a part of my life.”

But Molly had not been able to forget, and she had often wished to be in every way worthier of her lover.

Now, in answer to her fears, he smiled as he fondly stroked her brown wavy hair. "You wrong yourself, my child. That dear good woman, Lady Horsham, was always praising your housekeeping gifts. I am not sure"—he gave a comical smile—"that that didn't first fetch me. By the by, has your sister seen Sir Joshua, I wonder? He writes from Sidmouth."

Molly gave a little start.

"Why do you look frightened?" he said. "What harm can come to Mrs. Statham from being in the same neighborhood with him? Very likely they will not meet, and, if they do, depend upon it Mrs. Statham is well able to keep him at a distance. You say she has not mentioned him?"

"No." Molly did not say that she thought her sister's silence quite inconclusive. She knew that Berris had a surprising faculty for keeping her own counsel.

"What is it, then?" His penetrating dark eyes had been searching her face, and he saw that she had some trouble which she had not shared with him. "I can't let you have any secrets, little one."

"It is not a secret. It is only an unkind thought of mine, and it seems horrid to have it about one's own sister; but sometimes I can't help being afraid that Berris will marry him."

Dr. Yarm gave her a quick, startled glance.

"What makes you say that? Was there any acquaintance? She married, remember, before

you were so much at Edgerley. I never heard her name mentioned there."

"She was there once, but dear John did not like Sir Joshua, and the Horshams were away during the engagement. It was very short, you know. I believe Sir Joshua called once on Berris, and I told you he wrote to her and asked leave to call in the spring."

"But, my dear child, you said she made you answer the letter in a very discouraging manner. I do not think you need worry yourself."

"I dare say not. I told you it was an unkind idea to think such a thing of Berris, but I suppose I disliked his manner to Berris when she was at Edgerley; and she once told me he had stared at her very rudely before he knew who she was. I do not think he can be a nice man."

Michael Yarm smiled. He did not worship Mrs. Statham's beauty as her sister did, and it seemed to him unlikely that so rich a man as Sir Joshua had now become, a man who would be courted by hundreds of anxious mothers and daughters, would dream of marrying the widow of a country solicitor, however attractive she might be.

Dr. Yarm thought the tender, unselfish tone of Molly's letter would be a lesson to Mrs. Statham, and would, he hoped, make her feel that she was best out of the way at present. He did not want her in the North till he and Molly were married. He earnestly hoped Mrs. Statham would not propose to live with them, though such a plan would

be more tolerable in the roomy house at Colston than in the cottage which yesterday had seemed large enough to be happy in. But Dr. Yarm did not wish to have Berris as an inmate, though he knew that he could not refuse Molly should she think that her sister ought not to be left to live alone. He was more silent than usual as he walked up with Molly to the Gledhows'; and he was so silent during dinner that Mr. Gledhow teased him about his dumbness, and said he supposed that his good fortune had proved depressing.

When he was left alone with his host Michael Yarm said:

"Do you know, I think the sooner Molly and I get married the better? I have been told that Davey is in a hurry to get away, and I ought to be ready to take his place."

Mr. Gledhow laughed.

"You think the new doctor should be married before he begins his new work. Well, I dare say you are right. It will save disappointment to the Colston spinsters if you go among them as a married man. You know I wish the wedding to take place here, so you had better fix it up with Molly and Clara. Bless you, man, you have only got to tell Molly that it is her duty not to injure your future prospects by any hesitation, and she will say 'yes' like a bird."

Molly did not raise any difficulties, but she wrote again to Berris to tell her of the change of plans. Mrs. Statham wrote in answer to congrat-

ulate her sister on her improved prospects. She said frankly that she had always shrunk from seeing her the wife of a mere village doctor. "I must tell you," she added, "that I have seen Sir Joshua Horsham several times, and I fancy you both owe a good deal to him in this affair. Mrs. Vere is delighted with him, and she constantly asks him here, so that we are frequently seeing one another."

Molly put down the letter in sudden terror. Her fear had not been an idle one, and this marriage that she had so much dreaded was going to happen. Lady Horsham had not complained of her husband's neglect, but Molly had seen and judged for herself; and it seemed to her unworldly judgment that if Sir Joshua could be so cold and unkind to such a good and uncomplaining woman, what prospect of happiness could there be for Ber-
ris? Michael Yarm smiled when she said this.

"If things and people came by their deserts in this world," he said, "you might be right; but I should say that Sir Joshua would be more likely to behave well to a handsome, strong-willed wife who would exact a good deal of attention, than to a meek woman who bore her sufferings silently. It is just possible that the late Lady Horsbam would have done her duty better, so far as regards her husband, if she had asserted herself now and then."

Molly looked up saucily.

"Very well, I shall take that as a lesson, then;

and if you grow tired of me I shall remind you that a wife ought not to sit quiet under neglect."

He laughed as he kissed her. "That is a bargain. When I grow tired of you, you shall assert yourself. I wonder how you would begin," he said, with his quizzical smile. "Now, I have come to fetch you, and I have not any time to spare. I want to take you to Colston and go over the house with you, if you have no objection."

Molly clapped her hands with excitement, and a vivid color flushed into her cheeks.

Dr. Yarm stood thinking that there are people who would be happier and perhaps better in a simple life, and that Mrs. Statham was far too self-centred to make a husband happy.

"I will be ready directly," she said.

Molly came back, her eyes full of dancing light, and they went downstairs together. Miss Gledhow was waiting for them in her father's carriage.

"May I come, Molly?" she said. "Dr. Yarm invited me, but I wait for your invitation to see your house."

Molly laughed. "It will be Michael's house, won't it?"

"Molly, you are a little goose, and you will never modernize," Miss Gledhow said. "Nowadays a woman rules the house. The man has only to live in it and to take care that he behaves himself. You need not listen," she said laughingly to Michael. "I am simply trying to teach Molly how to be modern. Are you not very grateful to me?"

"Very." Presently he said: "Here is the house, Molly. Does it look as pretty as you expected it?"

Molly thought it looked delightful. It was a pleasant-looking house. Its only fault was that it lay rather near the road. The front was entirely covered with jasmine and roses, with a luxuriant wealth of buds; and these had for contrast the deep green, glossy leaves of a huge magnolia, showing now and again the rich rust-red behind them. The climbing plants grew so thickly that very little of the brickwork could be seen. The tiled eaves projected slightly over a stone cornice, and the chimney-stacks above looked quaint and comfortable.

"The living-rooms are almost all on the other side," Dr. Yarm said, as they went up three ancient stone steps, venerably cracked across the centre.

Molly was delighted with the hall. It was square, with two of the corners taken off. There was a door on each of three sides, while the fourth was occupied by an old staircase with quaint yet light mahogany handrail and balusters, and this being carried round the next story formed an open gallery looking down into the hall itself.

"It is pretty," she exclaimed, putting the stress on "is," in truly feminine fashion. "I do believe, Michael, you will be able to hang all your old prints up there and along the staircase wall."

Her anxiety about the size of the house was soon relieved. It was roomy, but it had only two floors, one of sitting-rooms, the other of bed-

chambers while over the kitchen and offices were a couple of servants' rooms. Molly saw that two good maids would be sufficient to keep it in order. This was a comfort, for she had heard Mr. Gledhow say her father's ruin had been partly caused by the expensive style of living needed for a large house.

The rooms were in keeping with the quaint outside. The owner had evidently had a sense of fitness in the furnishing. The ceilings were not lofty, but as the windows reached to them there was a fresh, pleasant atmosphere not always noticeable in old houses. The drawing-room had a bay-window at one end, while another window beside it opened on to a pleasant lawn, shaded at the end farthest from the house by a huge cedar tree. On the left side was a broad, square window deeply recessed; and this added to the size of the already large room. A door on the right led into a cheerful, cosey room, also looking on to the lawn. The dining-room was long and broad, less bright than the other, because it looked on to the road; and so did the small room on the farther side of the hall, which Dr. Yarm meant to use as his study.

Molly suggested that he should exchange it for the charming cosey room adjoining the drawing-room.

"No, thank you," he said, laughing. "That is yours. When I come home tired out I shall want you to be extra bright. I fancy a wife wants a

much more cheerful room to think in than a husband does to study in—always supposing him to be happily married.”

While Molly walked from room to room in a sort of quiet dream that suggested a fairy tale rather than a possible reality, Miss Gledhow said to Dr. Yarm:

“Mrs. Statham will be jealous. This is a more charming house than hers is at Woolton. It is, perhaps, not so large, but it is far more compact; and it has its own special charm. It is not like a dozen other houses. It is not pretentious, and yet it has a decided style. It is sure to please Berris, though. As I said, she will be jealous.”

Dr. Yarm had to hurry away, and the two ladies drove back to Northminster without him. He and Molly had settled to take a good deal of the late occupant's furniture, so that very little was wanted to make the house ready for occupation.

Miss Gledhow wished to drive Molly home with her, that they might spend the rest of the day talking over her future plans; but Molly said, “Please let me go home, dear! I have got to digest all this before I can quite take it in. You would find me a very dull companion to-day. I will come to-morrow if you like, and then I shall be able to profit by all your kind suggestions.” She hesitated. Except to Michael Molly had rarely spoken openly of her feelings. “You will laugh, perhaps, Clara, and I dare say it is an absurd fancy; but, even though I feel full of thankfulness

for all this, I have such a strong presentiment of coming evil, that I cannot shake it off. I feel just as I did the day before Berris was married."

"All the more reason why you should come home with me now. You will sit and brood over this by yourself."

Molly laughed.

"I have too much to do to brood," she said; and she bade good-by to her friend.

Part XI.

CHAPTER XXIV.

AT NIGHT.

Two days later Molly's presentiment was justified, when she received from Berris the news of her engagement to Sir Joshua Horsham.

"Do not be dreadfully shocked, you dear old-fashioned girl," Berris wrote. "We are not going to be married directly, but as Sir Joshua dislikes vulgar gossip as much as I do, I have decided to spend the rest of the year abroad. Mrs. Vere is going with me, and the poor woman is perfectly delighted. She has never been beyond Paris, and that was a good many years ago. Meantime I wish you and Michael Yarm all possible happiness, and I shall choose you a lovely present in Paris and send it over. When we do marry I fancy it will happen abroad. Sir Joshua dislikes fuss as much as I do, but I will let you know, Molly dear. I shall like to feel you are thinking of me."

Molly read the letter twice before she could believe it. There was not anything to find fault with, except in the news itself; but that news, to constant Molly, was a shock which for a time stu-

pefied her to all other considerations. It distressed her to think that poor, loving John Statham, who had so worshipped his wife, was already forgotten for this insolent, cruel man.

"I am sure he has a cruel nature. I hate the sight of his face," Molly said sadly. "It has an evil ugliness. Ah! and I know how he can look when he is not pleased. Poor Berris has only seen his smiles. Oh, it is too dreadful!"

She hid her face in her hands and cried bitterly. She fancied, when she once more read the letter, that Berris had softened. There had been a strange, hard tone in the other letters she had written from Branscombe, as if she were at war with every one. It seemed to Molly that her sister must really be happier than she had been before she left home. Her tears ceased as this thought came, and she dried her eyes. After all, it was possible that Sir Joshua might be able to make Berris happy. The stories which Molly had heard about him might not be true, and even if they were, Molly thought there was always in every one a possibility of repentance and reform. In that case, Sir Joshua's consciousness of neglect and unkindness toward his first wife might make him try to atone by extra good behavior to Berris.

If Molly could have been with her sister, she would have been puzzled by her manner. Mrs. Statham was haughty and capricious with Sir Joshua. More than once she pretended a headache, and sent Mrs. Vere down to receive his visit;

but in his absence she forgot the personal qualities in him which annoyed her in the delight of considering her future position. She should be Lady Horsham. She should be rich, and able to do all that she had so fondly, yet so hopelessly, dreamed about in these years of longing. She meant to do a great deal of good. She intended to have a much larger allowance than would be necessary to her for dress, so that she might spend money on others. There is perhaps no more seductive state of mind than that in which we picture ourselves as benefactors, giving happiness to others. While it lasts, this vision of the future makes us feel better and more virtuous than we ever felt in our lives, especially when we, like Berris, see ourselves on the point of realizing a long-cherished wish—a wish that has seemed hopeless, and which we have felt it was wrong to cherish. We really fancy we are growing quite good in the dazzling prospect of earthly satisfaction opened to us.

Berris felt benevolent and forgiving to every one. She even wrote an affectionate letter to Clara Gledhow, in which she announced her engagement; and she felt fonder of Molly than she had ever been in her life. She wished to ask her to come to Branscombe, and she told Sir Joshua her intention.

He was silent for a moment, and she fancied she saw a slight frown; but he forced a smile.

“Just as you please, of course,” he said carelessly; “but is not Miss Bedale much too busy to

leave home at present? I think you told me that she is shortly to be married."

Berris understood. She saw that Sir Joshua did not like Molly, and it would therefore be better to wait until she was Lady Horsham. Then she should do as she pleased. She believed that he would prove an indulgent husband. She had, indeed, told him that she could not endure control.

"Any one can lead me," she said; "but I have a spirit that will not be driven."

"You are a fine creature," he answered admiringly. "I like spirit in a woman."

After a day or two Berris felt less effusive, and she wondered how she could have thought of sending for Molly. Her sister would have recalled all sorts of awkward recollections, and just now Mrs. Statham never allowed herself to look back. All that made life desirable to her lay in the future.

They went to Paris together, and on the journey Berris was charmed with Sir Joshua's *savoir faire*. He established the two ladies in a pleasant, quiet hotel close to the Boulevard des Italiens, where he said they were in the neighborhood of everything; while he had rooms at the farther end of the street. Mrs. Vere's delight and excitement were sometimes trying to Berris, especially as the elder woman's imperfect knowledge of French made her feel very dependent on her beautiful friend; although Mrs. Statham assured her that there was not the slightest occasion for any one to speak anything but English in Paris.

The marriage had been fixed for October, but before they had been a fortnight in Paris Sir Joshua had persuaded Berris to shorten his time of waiting. They would be married quietly, he said. They were not in England, so there would be no gossip about their proceedings; and he more than hinted that Mrs. Vere's society, which under the present circumstances was indispensable, could very well be spared. Mrs. Statham declined to give an immediate answer, but Sir Joshua drew such fascinating descriptions of places to which he longed to take her when she was free to go with him, that one day she suddenly yielded.

"If you will get everything settled," she said, "I will marry you in a fortnight."

Sir Joshua was in a rapture of delight. Mrs. Vere declared he looked several years younger, though she did not feel quite so friendly toward him when he told her he must have his wife to himself when they were married. He proposed that Mrs. Vere should take a little journey in Switzerland, but the good woman had made a few acquaintances in Paris; she liked the gay city, and she had learned her way about its streets, therefore she decided on staying and sharing a lodging with an English acquaintance.

Everything was settled. The marriage was to take place next morning at the English church. Berris had asked Sir Joshua to take Mrs. Vere to the theatre this evening, so that she might be alone. She said good-night to Mrs. Vere, and told

her she should be asleep before they came back. She had brought over an English maid. To-night when the woman had brushed her hair and set everything straight, Mrs. Statham said she should read for a while before going to bed, and that she should not require her again that evening.

But when the maid went away Berris felt much too restless to read. She closed the book she had seemed absorbed in, and for a time she walked up and down her room, trying to shake off the crowding thoughts that forced themselves on her.

"I wish I had gone with them to the Français," she thought. "I might have known I should be like this. I was so last time."

She shivered. Why should she compare that last time with this, when everything was so different? She seated herself before one of the large mirrors. There were three in the room, each with its group of wax-lights on either side. Berris smiled a little sadly at the fatality which seemed to attend her marriages. It was so hard that she should not even this time have an admiring crowd to see what a lovely bride she made. Sir Joshua had so taken it for granted that she would prefer a very quiet wedding, that she had not liked to interfere with his arrangements. He had said that as a widow she would not require bridesmaids. She would have Mrs. Vere, and he had found a friend who would accompany him.

Berris felt strangely troubled. Instead of thinking of to-morrow and the crowning of her wishes,

Berris could only see that little group standing before the altar of the church in Northminster. She suddenly remembered that it was little more than a year since she had married John Statham. She shrugged her shoulders with impatience at her own folly. Why should she think of him to-night, when for so many nights she had succeeded in forgetting him? At the beginning of her engagement she had been tempted to make a comparison between her dead husband and the man she had promised to marry, and she had sternly told herself that it would be unfair to both to do this. Now, try as she would, she could not help seeing the dark, tender eyes and the earnest, truthful face of her young husband. She clasped her hands quickly over her eyes, to shut out the contrast between the man she had married and the man who was to succeed him. She could not shut it out. The coarse, sensual face seemed to leer at her satyr-like between her fingers. She rose, struggling against the disgust that was mastering her, and opening her eyes she saw herself in the glass; while melting into the gloom of the room behind her she saw John Statham.

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When Berris roused to consciousness she was lying on the ground at the foot of the large mirror. She rose and looked round her in terror. Then she hurried to the door and quickly remembered that she could not venture down to the sitting-room in her long white dressing-gown and

with her hair hanging in golden plaits over her shoulders. She rang, and after a long delay a waiter came and explained that madame's maid was doubtless asleep, that it was past twelve, and that almost every one had gone to bed. Should he take a message to the lady in the next room that madame was indisposed? The poor little waiter was himself very sleepy, but the pale, terrified face of the beautiful Englishwoman excited his compassion and made him wish to help her.

Berris was already comforted. His mention of Mrs. Vere, and the assurance that she was within reach, had reminded Mrs. Statham that the door between their rooms was fastened only on her side; and when she had dismissed the waiter she proceeded to unlock the door and open it, without the slightest regard to the alarm she might cause.

The sight of her friend's placid pink face above the smooth white sheet did more to quiet Berris' nerves than any words would have done. She hastily helped herself to some of Mrs. Vere's chloral, which that lady considered a specific against the ills of life, and always kept it beside her bed. Mrs. Statham went back to her room without closing the door between or putting out the lights, and she was soon sound asleep.

CHAPTER XXV.

FROM THE PAST.

It was a bright October afternoon. Sunshine was glittering on the Arno till the river looked like a coil of shimmering opal, while the towers and domes of fair Florence stood out against the sky, some radiant in light, and others a rich brown in groups of shadow; and yet, in spite of the sunshine, the wind was bitter, and Berris shivered and drew her wraps closer as she drove with her husband to San Miniato. The higher they mounted the colder the wind grew. She bit her lips with vexation when her husband put up his eye-glass and told the driver to stop.

Till they reached Florence the time had passed fairly pleasantly. Berris had greatly enjoyed the admiration she excited, and at Como and Maggiore she had been charmed with the lake scenery. She had developed a passion for boating, and when they went on to Venice she made such long gondola excursions that her husband grew completely bored. He did not complain, however. He liked to watch the enjoyment on her beautiful face, but he persuaded her, long before she had tired of Venice, that they had been there long enough.

They had now come on to Florence, and Berris was already tired of sight-seeing. She admired the picture-galleries and the views she saw of the country, but she had an intense dislike to museums and antiquities; and her husband told her that if she wished to pass muster among other travelled women she ought to visit the lions of this treasure-house of art.

"I don't care about the things personally," he said, "any more than you do; but as you grow older, my dear child, you will find that in England it is always advisable to do as others do."

Berris shrugged her shoulders and wished she was in Paris, where she meant to buy the remainder of her trousseau. She liked shopping better than dismal old churches. And now, at the end of a week of sight-seeing, she was so weary and mentally exhausted that she even wished herself back at Branscombe, where she could spend her morning on the sands and look at the sea, while she dreamed out a golden future.

She had certainly money to spend when she wanted it, and in Venice she had spent a good deal on what her husband called trash—beads, because their color pleased her, and Eastern-looking stuffs and glass, which Sir Joshua assured her she could buy quite as well in London without the anxiety attending its safe conveyance to England.

Sir Joshua was lavishly anxious that his young wife should spend all she wished for on her own personal adornment, but she had quickly discov-

ered that his taste was barbaric; and she had already asked him to change some of the presents he was constantly making her. She had, however, found him stingy. This morning she had proposed to him to purchase some exquisite tables in Florentine mosaic, and their price had alarmed him. He told her he should prefer to buy any new furniture she might wish for in London. Berris was aware that she had looked angry at the refusal, and that he had looked surprised. The constant change of scene and his efforts to amuse her, the absence of any care or worry, had hitherto helped her to avoid an outbreak of temper; and now, as she remembered the incident, she smoothed the frown that had gathered on her forehead and smiled as the carriage stopped. She was already sorry that she had looked so cross in the mosaic shop. Something warned her that Sir Joshua would not be a safe man to quarrel with; besides, if she managed well, she believed she should always be able to coax him over to her way of thinking, though she felt strangely repugnant to the idea of coaxing her new husband. She even shivered when the thought came.

"Are you cold, my darling? Perhaps we had better not go on. You have plenty to see still, in the way of churches and art treasures. Suppose we turn back and tell Pietro to drive to San Lorenzo, eh? You have not been there yet, you know."

Berris smiled.

"I really do not mind the cold, and I like driving ever so much better than seeing those stuffy churches."

"There is something else to see at San Lorenzo besides the church," he said stiffly, "but it shall be as you like."

She gave him one of her sweetest smiles.

"I want to see this lovely view again," she said gently, "and I have not seen the church here yet, you know."

Sir Joshua looked completely appeased, but Beris turned her head away to hide her vexation. She asked herself why she tried so much more to please this man than she had ever tried to please John Statham. It was surprising how constantly her thoughts now dwelt on her first husband. When Sir Joshua said anything with which she did not feel inclined to agree, she at once began to wonder what John would have thought of it. Why had she never felt afraid of John, and why was she afraid of offending Sir Joshua? She could not answer this question. She had seen Sir Joshua far more frequently before she married him than she had seen John Statham during their brief acquaintance and their hurried engagement; and yet she had at once felt at ease with the one man, while she was still a stranger in some ways to the other. John had told her his early history, and had encouraged her to talk to him about her father and mother and her life as a child; but except for the glimpse she had had of Sir Joshua

as Lady Horsham's husband, she was ignorant of his previous life. She could not have said what their talk was about. It seemed limited to the discussion of daily topics and the necessity of doing as the rest of the world was doing. Berris thought over all this, and she could hardly repress a groan. It would be worse still, she told herself, when they were back at Edgerley; and then she remembered her intention of filling the house with interesting people, and she became more cheerful. Yes, she thought it would be ever so much better then. She need hardly have anything to say to Sir Joshua. There would be always some one else to speak to, and the house was so large that really it would be quite possible gradually to separate herself, in a way, from her husband. Berris thought that this was one of the advantages of wealth which she had not sufficiently considered—the freedom it gave to the actual intercourse of daily life. In that small house at Woolton it would have been impossible to set up a barrier of this kind between herself and her husband.

They left the carriage when they reached the top of the hill, and then they stood looking at the glorious view below.

"Ah! how d'ye do, Horsham?" a voice said. Sir Joshua turned, and found himself face to face with an old acquaintance—a shabby, horsey-looking person—and instead of introducing him to his wife he turned abruptly from her and moved a few steps away from her with his new companion.

It seemed to Berris that she was slighted, unless indeed her husband considered this man unworthy of her notice; but it was dull to be left alone. Coming toward her she saw a fair young English girl and her husband, evidently only a year or two older. He was so handsome, and he had such a frank, honest expression as he met his wife's sweet, loving eyes, that Berris sighed with envy, and turned her head away as they came up to where she stood. On second thoughts she looked again at this happy couple. No, they were not rich, they were not even well off, she decided as she scanned the girl's simple, almost shabby gown and the man's suit, which seemed to be made by a country tailor.

"One cannot have everything," Berris said passionately to herself, "and yet beauties are said to get more than their share of this world's goods. Surely I ought to have all I wish for!"

There was contempt in the smiling glance she bestowed on the fair girl, whose eyes glistened as she pointed out to her husband how the tower of Giotto gleamed in the sunshine. What nonsense! Berris thought. What could a little sentiment signify? There was no value in it, and the cares of life so inseparable from a pinching income would soon obliterate every trace of it from the hard, work-a-day lives of these foolish children, as she called them from the height of her superior worldly wisdom. Yes, she told herself, she had made the best choice. Looks and youth and sen-

timent must all perish in the resistless wear and tear of life, but no friction could destroy the absolute power that money gives to a woman. Money could purchase youth, or its appearance, and could indefinitely prolong the beautiful period of a woman's existence, while it enabled her to gratify every wish almost as it came.

"That is all the happiness I care for," she said stoutly, as if she were trying to stifle some unwelcome suggestion. Memory suddenly, and almost intrusively, brought back the thought of Michael Yarm and Molly, and Berris wondered if their happiness was as supreme as they had expected it to be before their marriage.

The young couple walked on along the terrace. When they were out of hearing the girl said to her husband:

"Did you ever see such a lovely face? I think that is the first really beautiful woman I have seen."

"I do not call her beautiful," he answered. "She has a sneer, and she looks discontented."

"Ah! but, poor soul, she has married an old husband, and he does not look nice either. I saw them together yesterday at the Uffizi."

Sir Joshua had just come back to his wife.

"I have some news that will please you," he said. "There is to be a grand business to-night in the public gardens, a concert and some good fireworks. I hear the effect of the illuminated gardens is charming."

"My maid told me about it," Berris said carelessly, "but I did not suppose you would care about it."

"We need not stay long," he said, "but I am sure you would be pleased. Foreigners understand this sort of thing so much better than we do in England. You will go, will you not?"

She gave a languid consent. She was already tired of the day, and to go out again after dinner seemed to her a useless waste of energy. Berris liked foreign cookery. She enjoyed eating and drinking far more than she had ever done in England, and this was a chief point of sympathy between her and her new husband. He was pleased, too, to see that she could appreciate a glass of good wine, and he encouraged her to take more than John Statham would have thought good for so young a woman.

The dinner and wine to-day were perfect, and after so much open air Berris would greatly have preferred to have a nap when the waiter announced that the carriage was waiting to take them to the gardens.

It was a still, starlit night, and the spangled trees and fountains seemed to be trying to rival the brilliant sky. The trees gemmed with many colored lamps looked a pale gray against the tall, dark cypresses. White marble statues gleamed out among a constantly moving crowd of animated and talking people. Now a burst of music sounded from behind the large fountains, and when this

had ended a bright light shone across the scene, a herald of the coming fireworks. Berris was enchanted. She was broad awake now. She had, indeed, forgotten that she had wished for a nap. She liked this brilliant open-air scene far better than a hot theatre; besides, there was in the mysterious darkness around her an element of intrigue, the element which she had longed for in girlhood, but which seemed to have gone completely out of her life. She began to dream, as she sat back in the raised, comfortable seat which Sir Joshua had taken pains to secure for her, and she thought how easy it would be if she had a friend of her own—a friend, perhaps, whom Sir Joshua did not like as well as she did—how extremely easy it would have been to meet him here in the darkness, to talk to him even, while her husband stood up to watch the fireworks. When she went to England, Berris thought, she would have a friend or two. Two would be less likely to vex her husband. She had heard that old men were apt to be jealous of wives much younger than themselves, and although she knew she should never give him real cause for jealousy, still it was better not to give him cause for vexation. He could never be to her the friend that John Statham had been. Though he was so much older, she was not sure that he could advise her as well as John had often tried to do. She blushed as she remembered her rebellious disobedience to John's expressed wish on more than one occasion. How patient and

forgiving he had been! He had seemed sorry rather than angry. It would not be safe to disobey Sir Joshua—she looked up at him as the thought came. His thin, loose lips were parted with enjoyment, and his small eyes were almost hidden in the ugly grin that spread over his face. She shrugged her shoulders with disgust.

Her quick wits had long ago discovered that though Sir Joshua had a good deal of worldly tact and *savoir faire* when he chose to exert these qualities, he was not naturally clever. She observed that he took his opinions from the *Times*, and that he was unwilling to give an opinion till he knew what would be the popular verdict. He was in his wife's opinion a thorough snob, without an idea that was really his own. It was impossible that she could ever feel sympathy with him, even if she loved him; and she had never pretended to love him. When he hurried on the marriage she had told him that he must not expect her to forget so quickly, and he had promised to be patient. Now she felt strongly the want of a friend, some quiet, clever man—he need not be as young as she was, provided that he was young enough to understand her feelings and to read the books she cared for; she had read a good many since she left Paris. She looked round her on the farther side from her husband. Surely, she thought, many Englishmen in Florence must be gathered here to-night. She might see some one with whom she could strike up a friendship. The

upturned faces round her were very Italian, fat and olive-skinned, with bright, dark eyes and curly hair. What utterly unsympathetic faces they were! Berris thought; they all looked self-satisfied and self-centred. She looked again: there was not in the immediate circle near her any one who looked English. It was very strange, even weird, she thought, to see the faces in full light, as the brilliance of the ascending fireworks fell on them, while the bodies were indistinguishable, a mere dark mass, inseparable from the closely wedged shrubs and overshadowing trees. Berris yawned from sheer weariness. No, there was nothing that interested her here. She was already tired of those many-colored fires, and her head ached with the noise of the bursting explosives. Once more she turned to her husband. There was an imperious look on her face, but he did not see it. His opera-glass hid the expression of his eyes, and it was levelled, at least so it seemed to his wife, at two women sitting exactly opposite—women whom she had already stigmatized as actresses of no very good repute.

Berris touched his arm very lightly with her fingers.

"Sir Joshua," she said, "have we not been here long enough? I am tired."

He turned round, stared at her impatiently—savagely, she fancied.

"Tired already, eh? Wait just a few minutes,

and we will go. I want to see the next set piece. Have a little patience, my darling."

A dull, distrustful dread seized on Berris. She remembered that she knew nothing, certainly nothing good, of this man. Suppose he were what Mrs. Harrow had hinted, and what others had openly called him, an utter profligate! She watched him as he went back to his gazing, and she saw that though the set piece for which he professed to wait was a very good one, Sir Joshua's eyes never strayed from the highly rouged, bold-eyed woman at whom his glass was levelled. His wife felt as if she could have strangled him. She did not care for his love, but he was her husband, he belonged to her, and it was insupportable that he should dare to bestow attention on any other woman. She felt that he must be punished at once for such an outrage. She looked round her. The crowd, closely wedged as it had appeared to be, had drifted onward and a new set of faces offered themselves to her notice. Many of these were like the former ones she had seen, Florentines of an ordinary type. Among them now and again she saw a finely cut profile and a receding chin, with a mass of red hair crowning the forehead. She looked slowly and carefully, scanning every face, but unable to find one in which she could hope for sympathy. It seemed to her that there was not one that expressed gentle feeling or truth. She looked again at her husband. He was still

staring in the same direction, and as she looked across to see whether the women were aware of his notice her eyes fell on a face in the crowd below. It seemed as if they were drawn to it by some irresistible magnetism. She rose to her feet with eyes dilated, and lips parted widely in the shock of her surprise. Some little way off was the face of John Statham.

Berris felt desperately giddy. She caught at the barrier in front of her. The sudden violence of her gesture attracted her husband's notice, and then her ghastly face shocked him.

"What is it?" he began, but she interrupted him.

"Take me away instantly. I am ill, very ill," and she sank into her seat.

Part XII.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A HOME.

MOLLY was in a flutter of expectation. She had been upstairs for the last time to make sure that her sister's room was ready, then she had peeped into the dressing-room beside it, which she had arranged for Lady Horsham's maid. Everything was ready and in order, and now she gave a critical look round her cosey drawing-room to make sure that the fire was burning brightly and that the most comfortable cushions were heaped on the sofa near the fire. Dr. Yarm had lingered before starting on his afternoon round, as Lady Horsham was expected about three o'clock. He seemed to be reading the note-book in his hand, but in reality he was watching his wife with a smile of delighted amusement, as she hovered about, sometimes near him, sometimes at the farther side of the quaint room. Just now she was grouping the few flowers she had been able to collect nearer together, so that they might be more effective.

"Come here, little woman," her husband's de-

cided voice said; "come and sit down a minute. I think you have done wonders with that handful of flowers, but I cannot let you tire yourself out even for Berris."

He patted the seat beside him, and Molly sat down and leaned her head on his shoulder, surprised to find how really tired she was.

They did not talk to one another, these two; they seemed to enjoy the delicious silence, so sure were they of each other's perfect love and trust.

Molly had been greatly troubled to learn the news of her sister's illness in Florence; it seemed yet more alarming to learn it by a letter from Sir Joshua. He wrote that Lady Horsham had had a sudden and alarming attack of faintness, and that the doctor he had called in had said she must be kept very quiet. She was better when he wrote, but not yet well enough to write herself. He added that they would soon be in England; would leave Florence as soon as Lady Horsham was well enough, as she had taken a great dislike to the city, and thought it did not agree with her. In this letter Sir Joshua had spoken of a speedy return, but when Berris wrote she said they were going to the Riviera. She was still weak, and the sudden change of climate was considered a risk for her till she was in stronger health. Berris had always had such singularly good health that Molly had indulged in many conjectures as to the cause of this sudden illness.

"You do not know," Dr. Yarm said, "how much

you both owe to the thrift and the constant employment laid on you as girls. I expect that your sister has greatly missed her long walks, and also that she needs them more than she did, seeing that her diet is sure to be far less simple. Among wealthy people I believe a good deal of disease is fostered, if not generated, by the constant use of a carriage and by over-dainty cookery. Lady Horsham will be, I fancy, all right again when she gets back to England."

He said, however, when at last a letter came announcing their return, that they had chosen an unwise time of year, for Christmas was just over and the weather was bitterly cold.

"I must go, Molly," he said. "Time's up. You must make my best excuses, dear, though I expect your sister will prefer to find you alone after such a long absence. Sir Joshua has acted wisely in letting her come here while he makes sure that all is ready and well aired at Edgerley. I know how damp the place is in winter, and it will be worse than usual after being so long shut up."

He said good-by to his wife as lovingly as ever. All these months of married life had evidently strengthened, rather than lessened, the affection of these married lovers.

Molly sighed with satisfaction as she looked after him. She often wondered at her own unworthiness of the happiness that had fallen to her lot. She was too humble to be conscious that she

and her husband had laid the best possible foundation for married happiness, because they neither of them expected to find perfection in a fallible human being, and they both knew that forbearance is the corner-stone of human peace.

Molly was a little nervous. She felt timid about receiving Lady Horsham; perhaps she was most timid about Lady Horsham's maid, who would probably be more difficult to please than her mistress. The sound of carriage-wheels put all her fears to flight; she could only think of the joy of once more seeing her sister.

Berris was so muffled in a long furred cloak and a fur cap pulled down over her forehead that her face was scarcely to be seen, but she kissed Molly warmly, and seating herself on the sofa she let her sister take off her wraps in smiling silence. She looked very pale, Molly thought; very handsome, but a good deal older. She had, too, a striking repose of manner, which seemed to her sister a new feature. Molly asked after Sir Joshua, and she was struck with the scornful indifference with which his wife answered that he was as well as usual—he was always well.

“What was the matter with you, dear?” Molly said tenderly, and as she spoke the old motherly feeling she used to have for Berris came back and her new shyness vanished. “I was so very sorry to hear of your illness.” She was sitting beside her sister, and as she spoke she put her hand on Lady Horsham's. The loving touch thrilled

through Berris; she clasped Molly's hand warmly in hers and looked affectionately at her.

"I wished for you then, Molly; you could have helped me." She paused and made an effort at self-control. A sudden impulse had made her long to tell Molly of the vision she had fancied in Florence, and then she remembered that Molly was married, and would probably confide her story to Michael Yarm. "It was, I fancy, a sudden fright I had one evening when we were looking at fireworks. I was dazed, and I could not remember anything for a day or two. The doctor told me I had been highly feverish and he seemed amazed when I recovered so quickly, but I was determined to leave Florence. Don't you know how you hate a place when it once gets on your nerves? Ah! no; I forgot you have never travelled. Well, when we reached Pordighiera I fell ill again, and we had to stop there till I grew stronger. I cannot tell you how I longed to reach England and see you again. I would not even stop in Paris; I insisted on coming straight to you, instead of going to Edgerley."

Molly kissed her and thanked her, and then she persuaded her to rest. Berris admired the house as she went to her room, and when she came down to dinner rested and charmingly dressed, she looked quite her old self again, and Dr. Yarm rallied her on the subject.

"I expected to see a delicate invalid," he said. "I was really nervous about your return to this

cold climate at such a time of year; I am glad to find that my anxiety was causeless."

The evening passed off pleasantly, and so did the next day; but when Lady Horsham went to her room on the third evening, she told herself that she had made a mistake in coming to stay with the Yarms. She had been trying to forget John Statham, and here she was constantly reminded of him: little presents that he had made to Molly, now and then a chance word of her sister's, and, worse than all, her own weakness. One day when she thought Molly was safely out of the way, Berris had opened a photograph book that lay on the drawing-room table; she felt curious to see whether it held John's likeness. Yes, there it was, and Berris hung over the face, so strikingly like the one she had seen in those dark gardens. Could it have been John? And then she smiled at her own fancy. She had asked herself that question very often, and she had succeeded in convincing herself that she had simply imagined what she had seen. One thing was certain—the man's eyes had met hers, and they must therefore have seen that she was with Sir Joshua. She felt sure that if John were living he would not try to take her away from her new husband; but although she had decided that it was only a fancy, the incident had made Florence hateful to her. She felt the need of fresh surroundings. As she looked at the portrait, she remembered how dearly John had loved her. It was curious how truly she now believed

in John Statham's love, and this remembrance made it intolerable to her to see the happiness of Michael and Molly. She told herself that they ought not to make their happiness so apparent, and when she thought of life at Edgerley with Sir Joshua, she felt angry with Molly for looking so bright when she was expecting her husband to return. Till that memorable evening at Florence, Lady Horsham had tolerated her husband as the price she had to pay for all the advantages that surrounded her; but when she recovered consciousness, Sir Joshua's delight at her recovery annoyed her, and she remembered his behavior during the fireworks. She was not jealous of him because she did not love him, but it seemed an unpardonable insult that a man possessed of such a wife as she was should care even to look at another woman. She did not reproach him, but she resolved to punish him for what she considered an outrage. Her persistent coldness during her recovery had irritated him, and he was delighted when she urged a return to England. He hoped that the complete change and the pleasure of finding herself mistress of Edgerley would restore her to herself and would improve her temper, for he thought her illness had made her sulky. He had not discovered that she had begun to hate him.

Yes, that was the truth that Berris was telling herself on this third evening. She could not bear to see the love in her sister's eyes as they rested on Dr. Yarm and the gladness she evidently felt

at the sight of him, and then Berris forced herself away from considering that side of the question, and told herself that she was a simpleton—as great a simpleton as Molly was. Life was the same to every one who had any possessions. Here was Molly, full of an imaginary happiness in the husband on whom she doted, and who would probably deceive her one of these days, and in the baby her sister expected next year, who would most likely bring her no end of trouble. Besides, highly as her sister prized her home, Berris thought that after all it was very mediocre. Molly and Dr. Yarm were doing the best they could to entertain her, and she thought it was very nice of them; but Berris considered it was miserable only to keep two maids and a groom, and she blushed as she reflected that when she asked Molly to Edgerley her sister would certainly come without a maid. She wondered what her own maid could think of the meagreness of the Colston household. Before Berris went to bed she wrote to her husband and asked him to meet her next day at Mr. Gledhow's. She did not choose to let Molly see her meeting with Sir Joshua, nor did she choose Sir Joshua to come to Colston.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A WISH FULFILLED.

"THIS is where I first saw you," Sir Joshua said, as he led Berris on to the terrace at Edgerley, bare of flowers now, yet looking bright with a slight coating of snow. "Do you know what I said to myself that day, Berris?"

"What was it?" she smiled. She felt in high spirits; the obsequious greeting of the household assembled in the hall to receive their new mistress had made her feel that it was really worth while to be a person of so much importance.

Sir Joshua looked delighted to be questioned.

"I had grown utterly weary of my life with that poor woman, and I said to myself that, if ever I was a free man, you should be my wife."

Berris laughed. "Suppose I had refused you?"

He looked at her with more expression in his eyes than she had thought them capable of showing.

"You would not have refused me if I had told you how long I had loved you and that my happiness depended on our marriage. You are really kind-hearted, my child, though you do not always do yourself justice."

Berris was touched. She put her hand in his arm as they walked along the terrace.

"We shall get on better here," she said gently. "It is a comfort to be really at home."

Sir Joshua looked so much pleased that she repented her words, and then consoled herself with the reflection that they were so close to the house there was no fear that he would be demonstrative. In spite of the cold, she insisted on going round the grounds and praised the order in which everything was kept. This appreciation delighted her husband and entirely removed the painful impression which her cold, indifferent greeting had created when they met in Northminster. He began to think that only her illness had caused his wife's change of manner toward him, and that she was really the sweet creature he had fancied her to be during his courtship. She had pleased him very much by refusing to dismiss any of the old servants, although her refusal had not been graciously worded when he put the question to her the day they reached London.

"If they are good servants, and do their duty well," she said, "why should they be sent away? I consider servants as machines; individually I take little interest in them."

This side of his wife's character secretly delighted Sir Joshua. He considered her haughty spirit a proof of real dignity, and as he had not personally suffered from its effects he encouraged her to display it.

"I am going to ask a man or two to stay," he said. "I hear the frost is giving already. There

will be a meet on Saturday, and my horses are sadly in want of exercise."

Her eyes sparkled with expectation.

"I suppose," she said, "that I shall require a little practice before I can ride to hounds. What do you think?"

"I should greatly prefer to see you in a carriage at the meet," he said. "A lady should ride for her health and for exercise, but I really could not suffer you to appear in the hunting-field, my dear child."

"I know I should look very well on horseback. You said I did in Florence, and you said I rode very gracefully."

There was a suppressed sob in her voice as she ended.

"So you did, darling, quite charming, but that is different. To be able to take your place among these hunting ladies, you should have been accustomed to ride from early childhood. Riding is one of the things that must be acquired early." He saw her look of deep disappointment, and he added, in a soothing tone, "But in any case I could not have suffered you to hunt, Berris."

"Why not?" she said impetuously.

He tried to laugh down the anger he saw in her eyes. After all, he thought she was a spoiled child, and he must be patient in breaking her in.

"To begin with, you would soon spoil that faultless complexion, and next, you are altogether too handsome, and you might attract some very undesirable notice."

Berris tossed her head.

"You should have considered all that before you married me," she said scornfully. "A man cannot shut his wife up and keep her under a glass case."

She had spoken angrily, but when she looked up, a little frightened at her own daring, he was smiling at her.

"I am not quite such a dog in the manger, I hope," he said. "I am too proud of my beautiful wife to grudge others a sight of her, but the hunting-field is not a nice place for ladies unless they are tough and ugly—the fatigue is very great and there are all sorts of risks to be run. Only last year a friend of mine, a very nice woman, was actually ridden over by another lady who had lost all power over her horse. The husband told me it was a mercy the poor thing did not recover—her face was so utterly disfigured."

He was looking at Berris, and he saw that she grew suddenly pale.

"I have asked a very old friend of mine, Major Durant, and he wants to bring a ward of his, who is also his nephew—a raw sort of boy, I fancy. You will not object to him, will you, my dear? And I have also asked my cousin Algy Wace. You will like Wace, Berris; he is said to be my double, and he is one of the keenest sportsmen I know."

"Are you the same age?" She tried to speak as if she were interested.

"I fancy Wace is a few years younger, but the major is our senior, and yet he used to be one of the youngest men I know—full of energy, the hardest rider, the most active skater—yes, he will be the best master you can have on the ice, Berris. You must ask him to give you lessons."

She thought his tone patronizing, and she said saucily: "Do you know I should prefer some one younger. Suppose I fall, the major will be much slower at picking me up than a younger man would be."

She was delighted to see that she had vexed him.

"I shall of course be always near you, Berris," he said repressively. "If I thought you were likely to fall, I should forbid you to skate; but, my dear child, you could not do anything so awkward."

"No one knows what they can do till they try." She laughed, and felt glad that they had come to the end of their round and had reached the house on the farther side. She stopped a moment to ask on what day the visitors were expected, and then she nodded to her husband and escaped to her bedroom. She had had enough of her husband's society for the present, and when she had changed her outdoor wraps for a furred tea-gown and had seated herself in an easy-chair close to the fire, she told her maid that she should not go down till dinner-time; she could bring her tea upstairs.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

BERRIS AMUSES HERSELF.

THE thaw proved to be make-believe. It lasted till evening, and then during the night a keen frost spread itself over the ground and put an end to Sir Joshua's hopes about the coming Saturday. The visitors, however, seemed less disappointed than he had expected. A few hours would put the ice in excellent condition, and when they parted for the night they were all looking forward to a good morning's skating. All except Sir Joshua; he was so discomfited that he could hardly keep from being angry. He asked himself what the major could mean. He had asked leave to bring his ward, a mere boy, he had said, and when the visitors appeared in the drawing-room and he introduced this ward as Mr. Sydney Bateman, Sir Joshua found himself looking at a handsome, well-set-up young fellow, of certainly more than twenty years old, and as he presented him to Lady Horsham he saw a flash of admiration in Mr. Sydney Bateman's eyes which he considered to be most objectionable. He had asked his wife if she would like to invite some girl friend so that she might not be the only lady, but Berris had

answered that she had not any girl friends, and that she did not mind being alone.

At dinner she had on her right the rector of Edgerley, an ardent fox-hunter and tennis-player, and on her left the Honorable Algernon Wace, and considering how new everything was to her she made a very fascinating hostess. When she left the table, her two visitors both secretly envied Sir Joshua his new wife. Sir Joshua had contrived to watch Berris during dinner, and he had not intercepted one stray glance in the direction of the younger visitor. Sir Joshua resolved to break up the party early; he told himself it was his duty to shield Berris from the young fellow's calf-like admiration.

But Mr. Bateman proved too clever for his host. He had seemed quiet and rather timid with his host on his arrival, but he contrived to be first in the drawing-room, and he had asked Lady Horsham to sing in less than no time. It came out that he sang also, and the major was sufficiently indiscreet to propose that his nephew should sing a duet with Lady Horsham. Sir Joshua felt furious as he looked at the handsome young fellow bending over his wife at the pianoforte; but he could not find a reasonable excuse for getting rid of Mr. Bateman—he could not even reprove his wife for singing with the visitor. Finally, he proposed whist, and he told Berris significantly that they should probably play late. She smiled. She perfectly understood his manœuvres, and as she in-

tended to see as much as she chose of Mr. Bateman during his visit, she soon left the whist-players to their game.

While her maid brushed her long, fair hair, Lady Horsham decided that after all her life had greater possibilities of amusement in it than Molly's had.

"And so it ought to have," she said, with a saucy, well-pleased survey of herself in the glass.

The weather was perfect next morning—very cold but bright; the shrubs near the lake glistened hoarily as the party reached it. Sir Joshua fastened on his wife's skates and guided her for the first half hour on the ice. This was not, however, the way in which Lady Horsham had proposed to amuse herself, and she felt deeply grateful to the pompous butler when he brought a message which obliged Sir Joshua to return to the house. He looked anxiously round him, and was glad to find Major Durant close by.

"Will you take charge of Lady Horsham till I come back?" he said. "She wants a little help at present."

The major was charmed to be of service, but Lady Horsham did not at once continue to skate. She began to ask him about skating in Holland, and whether it was really true that in winter one could go from one end of that country to the other. While she stood talking Mr. Bateman came up, and the major at once turned to him.

"Sydney, you can tell Lady Horsham a good deal more about Holland than I can; you skated there last winter, I fancy."

Mr. Bateman said he had gone with the intention of skating, but that the frost had ended a day or so after his arrival.

"I am sure no ice could be better than this," the bright-eyed young fellow said. "Will you not try again, Lady Horsham?" He gave Berris an imploring glance, and she looked at Major Durant. The old man smiled.

"I fancy you had better take Sydney's offer; he skates far better than I do. The fact is, I have spent the last three winters in the South, and I am not in practice. Will you look on Sydney as my deputy in the matter?"

Berris thanked him with a fascinating smile, and was off in an instant with her young guide. She had often skated as a child, and she had a natural aptitude for the exercise. With Mr. Bateman she went at double the speed she had gone with Sir Joshua. Her cheeks had flushed, her eyes glistened till they looked a deeper blue than ever, and her exquisite complexion seemed yet more flower-like against her rich, dark furs. Mr. Bateman had just begun to teach his beautiful companion a step he had invented, simply as an excuse for taking her to the unfrequented end of the lake, when he caught sight of Sir Joshua returning from the house.

He looked at Berris, and though she did not turn

her head she guessed why his eyes had been so beseeching.

"Let me try, again, please," she said, giving him her slender hand. "I will do your step over and over again until I am perfect in it."

Sir Joshua skated up to her before she considered herself perfect in the new step.

"You are doing wonders," he said. "Shall we take another round?"

He thought she looked lovely as she laughed at him.

"No, please, not now. I must go on practising till I am perfect. You go and enjoy yourself; I shall soon be able to skate properly with you." She held out her hand to Mr. Bateman, and skated away to some distance.

"It is ever so much nicer to practise without an audience—do you not think so?" She looked so arch, so altogether provoking, that Sydney told himself it was a sin and a shame that such a perfect bit of flesh and blood should be thrown away on a man old enough to be her father. He was beginning to feel infatuated. He knew that old husbands were proverbially jealous, and Sir Joshua had looked very unpleasant last night at the close of the duet which the young fellow had sung with Lady Horsham. Mr. Bateman was handsome and agreeable. He was a general favorite in country-houses, but he had his way to make in the world, and he was decidedly unwilling to allow himself to be drawn into a flirtation likely to give offence to

so rich a man as Sir Joshua Horsham. He had already divined that Lady Horsham was not very accustomed to society. Beautiful as she was, he wished she were less indiscreet; he and she might have had a delightful time together if she had allowed things to happen more gradually. For instance, he considered that when her husband came back she should at once have gone back to join him when he evidently wished for her. Mr. Bateman began to feel that his hostess was putting him in an awkward position. The one quality this attractive young fellow lacked was physical courage, and the dread of exciting the brute force which he felt sure was latent in Sir Joshua Horsham robbed his morning of the enjoyment which his favorite exercise usually gave him. He did not know how completely his eyes had betrayed his admiration to Berris. She was electrified when he said he thought she had learned the step perfectly, and proposed that they should join the others who were executing a reel at the farther end of the ice.

They were soon after summoned in by the luncheon-bell, and Sir Joshua's manner was so extremely pleasant during the meal that Mr. Bateman felt he had been over-cautious.

Berris always looked best in white, and to-night her dress was exquisite soft, snowy silk, finely embroidered with seed pearls. It showed to perfection the long lines of her graceful figure. She teased Major Durant during dinner about his skat-

ing, and promised, if the frost lasted, to teach him her new step next morning. She did not offer to sing after dinner, and before her husband could propose cards she had managed to begin a story made up of one of their Venetian experiences. She sat on a sofa telling the story to Mr. Wace, who had come up to her in the drawing-room; but the others soon began to listen, and their interest fired Berris as they grouped round her. She went on embellishing her story until she sent her audience into shouts of laughter, much of which, it must be owned, was at Joshua's expense, the foundation of the incident being, according to Lady Horsham's version, her husband's diverting attempts to make himself understood in Italian.

He laughed apparently as heartily as any one of his guests did, but when the story was finished he proposed cards, and told his wife that she looked tired and must not keep late hours.

"Hateful old wretch!" Lady Horsham said to herself, as she went to her bedroom. "I could strike him when he smiles like that; perhaps I shall strike him some day if he provokes me."

While she breakfasted in her room next morning, she was disgusted to receive a note from Major Durant. In it he said good-by for himself and his nephew. He was unexpectedly summoned away by the death of a friend, he wrote, to whom he was appointed executor, but he hoped she would allow him to return at a later period.

Berris felt crushed. Just as a little bit of amuse-

ment had come in her way it was cruel that it should be taken from her. She did not believe the major's note; she had noticed his devotion to her husband, and she felt certain that these two hard-hearted old men had leagued together to stop her small flirtation with Mr. Bateman.

"It is too unjust; it was not a flirtation. I only wanted to see if the fellow would do for a friend, and if they had waited, I should most likely have found out that he is only good for singing and skating, probably for playing tennis and golf. He could never have helped me with my thoughts, as poor, dear John could have helped me. If I could only find some one like John!"

The thought of her husband always made her sad. She had at last persuaded herself that she had been mistaken at Florence, but she had never recovered from the repulsion that her vision had given her present husband.

Mr. Wace remained, but he did not attract her. She saw that he admired her, but she also saw that he admired himself far too much to care to talk much to her. She also saw that he watched her critically. She felt glad when he went away and she was left alone with Sir Joshua.

Part XIII.

CHAPTER XXIX.

PLAIN SPEAKING.

THE winter had been a dry one; it had been also very cold, with a singularly long frost, and Berris spent little of the day-time in-doors. Sometimes she skated from early morning till dusk, and more than once she had had lanterns fixed on the trees beside the lake, so that she might prolong her amusement. She had persuaded the rector that it was very healthy exercise, and did her best to coax his maiden sister to join them; but Miss Pierrepont, though plain and elderly, was sharp-witted, and she secretly called Lady Horsham a flirt.

On one occasion she had said as much to her brother.

"It's all very well, Louis"—she raised her pointed chin as she spoke—"and I dare say it amuses you, but her ladyship likes to have you at the manor-house to keep her hand in and to serve as a precedent for something younger later on. I'm not going to be drawn into it. Lady Hor-

sham thinks I am a blind old goody, and she simply wants me to play propriety in case of need. You need not frown, Louis, dear; you see I am a woman, and naturally I understand women best."

Miss Pierrepont had been away on a visit when Lady Horsham came to Edgerley, and she had not heard of Mr. Bateman's visit. Her ideas, therefore, were purely intuitive.

The few visitors at the manor-house during the winter had been dull, gouty old gentlemen and an uncle and aunt of Sir Joshua's. Berris had found them all extremely wearisome. She had gone over several times to see Molly; she took long walks and rides, and she seemed bent on tiring herself; but her health was excellent. She and her husband rarely met in day-time except at luncheon, and Berris had taken to such early hours that she often went up to bed before her husband appeared in the drawing-room. There had not been any absolute quarrel between them, but day by day they had become further apart. It seemed to Berris that her husband did not admire her as much as he used to, and she considered this an unpardonable slight. John, poor fellow! had never tired of her beauty; he had never uttered such outspoken compliments as her present husband occasionally indulged in, but she had known what John thought of her. It seemed to Berris that there had been a change in Sir Joshua ever since her little flirtation with Mr. Bateman. If this was so, she decided that the best way to cure her husband would be

to fill the house with bright young people, and then she should have the support of numbers. There need not be many girls among them, and yet she smiled at the mere notion of any rivalry; she had never seen a girl half as beautiful as she was.

Lent had just begun, and Lady Horsham knew that Edgerley had always been filled with visitors at Easter. She remembered how she used to covet the charming spring costumes of the ladies who had driven into Northminster with her predecessor. Her lip curled as she called up the poorly dressed Berris of those days; but if she meant to fill her house with guests, and to shine like some beautiful planet among a group of lesser lights, she felt that she must be on more intimate terms with her husband than she was at present, and yet she had so rejoiced in his coldness that it seemed vexatious to take any steps likely to bring them nearer together.

Berris never hesitated in carrying out an idea. She decided one morning after breakfast that it was time to make out a list of guests, and at luncheon she began her attack. She resolved that if Sir Joshua objected to her plan she would ask him to take her to London or abroad; she was tired of living at Edgerley without any change.

"What do you think of doing for Easter?" she said, smiling across the table at him.

His wife so rarely addressed him except to find fault, that Sir Joshua put down his newspaper and looked at her in surprise.

"I had not thought of doing anything different," he said gravely.

"But you always entertain a good deal at Easter, don't you? I remember you used to have a houseful."

"In those days, you see, I had not you to amuse me," he said, with studied politeness. "I think we get on better without visitors."

Berris bit her lips. "I am tired of monotony," she said wearily. "I want you to let me have a few young people in the house; it will be a change for both of us."

She fancied he looked amused, and her hopes of success increased.

"I have heard you say you dislike girls," he said, smiling.

"I do, as a rule—yes, but our visitors need not be all girls. There would be, of course, a mother or two, and we must have some eligible men or the mothers will not bring their daughters. I am sure a little variety will amuse you, and I shall delight in it."

"Possibly; but, my dear Berris, you have to learn a good deal before you undertake a gathering of this sort. The people who have been accustomed to visit at Edgerley are extremely well-bred, and—and well accustomed to society, and—and you have not had much practice in that sort of thing. I could not, for instance, run the risk of a repetition of what took place here in the winter. I took no notice of you." He said this in what he con-

sidered a soothing tone, for a bright flush showed on her fair face. "No, my child, I do not blame you in the matter; you are very charming, but you have been brought up differently, that is all. In time you will be just like other people, and you will learn the art of treating your guests in the same manner, with the same amount of courteous attention, without showing a special liking for any one."

Berris had prided herself on the self-control she had learned to practise, but she could not keep the angry blood from showing in her face, and her eyes had a look of fury in them.

Her husband was startled as she rose up and stood facing him. She still, however, determined, if possible, not to be angry in words.

"I must have change," she said. "I am tired to death of our dull life, and I am sure you are tired of it too, only you do not say so; you see I am more honest."

He smiled cynically.

"Sit down, my dear, and pray do not excite yourself. I assure you, excitement spoils your complexion; besides, it justifies my fears for you as a hostess. The best proof that I am not dull lies in the fact that I remain at Edgerley instead of roaming as I used to and leaving you to amuse yourself alone here."

He looked grave as he ended, and she felt a little afraid of him.

"If you were to go away," she said, "I fancy I

should imitate your example. You could not expect me to stay here alone."

He bent his head. She thought he looked very ugly as he said:

"I am flattered that you set so much store by my society, but you will find that a good many wives are accustomed to be left to amuse themselves without their husbands."

"Then it is evident that I am not like other wives. I should not choose to be left alone or to go on living without change. I think you are very unkind not to have visitors. I have been looking forward for weeks to seeing the house full, or I could not have gone on so patiently. It seems to me—" She paused and looked down at him; the sneering smile on his lip set her anger free from restraint. "You are a tyrant!" she said vehemently. "If I could have guessed what you really were, I would never have married you."

His face looked suddenly brutal. In spite of her anger, Berris shivered with a kind of superstitious terror.

"Silence!" he said, in a low, harsh voice, more impressive than vehemence would have been—"silence, you little fool! You are behaving like a mad woman; I should be justified in locking you up in an asylum. Now listen: I'll have no more of this. You married me, I take it, for myself and for the pleasure of living at Edgerley Manor-house as Lady Horsham. You have gratified both your wishes, and I intend you to

"Stay here quietly with me for another year. Husbands and wives are the most suitable company that one another."

Berris grasped the back of the chair on which she had been sitting till her knuckles showed white, she was quivering with fear and anger.

"Take me to London!" she burst out. "Let us go abroad again; I cannot, I will not stay here!"

"Be silent. I cannot afford to do either," he said rudely. "We spent too much money on that foreign journey, and it will be some months still before I get any proceeds from the new estates. I am sorry to disappoint you, but you will have to be content with my company for some time to come." His harsh, determined tone made her feel desperate.

"I cannot and I will not!" she cried. "Take care how you make me hate you. You ought not to have married me unless you meant to try to make me happy. I will not stay with you to be ill-treated. I told you I did not love you, and you said your love would win mine—your love, indeed—just!"

But Joshua rose from his chair. "I have had enough of your folly, you headstrong fool, and——"

Berris stood still for some minutes. She was at first too angry to think; then becoming quieter she told herself that her husband's conduct could not be passed over. She must separate from him; she should surely be happier alone than with this hate-

ful man. She looked round her as she stood thinking. No, she could not do this; she could not bear to give up all this state and luxury which had gradually become a part of her existence. She knew what poverty and pinching meant, and she thought that no price was too high to pay for wealth and what it brought. Sir Joshua—she gave a writhe of disgust as she thought of him—well, Sir Joshua had behaved brutally, but she felt sure he did not want to lose her. His jealousy showed that; she must think it out when she was calmer.

She went upstairs and threw herself on her sofa. The rain was falling in torrents, and she felt too wretched to risk a soaking. Her head ached and she was quivering from head to foot; she drew a warm shawl over her and fell fast asleep.

When Berris roused, her maid was arranging her tea on a little table beside her sofa.

“I did not like to disturb your ladyship,” the woman said, as Berris gave her a bewildered stare, “but the dressing-bell will ring in less than half an hour, so I came in when your ladyship did not answer.”

While she drank her tea Berris thought she would make herself look as attractive as possible, so that Sir Joshua might feel the more ashamed of his treatment. He ought to be very much ashamed of himself, she thought; she should treat him with dignified silence till he apologized.

She was surprised not to find him in the draw-

ing-room when she went down. The dinner-bell rang, and then the gong sounded its sonorous warning through the house. Berris felt surprised; her husband was always punctual. She smiled with a slight triumph; it was evident, she thought, that he shrank from facing her after his rude coarseness.

Presently she heard the butler's slow, pompous tread. He threw the door open and announced dinner; then he stopped and cleared his throat: "I was to say, my lady, that Sir Joshua has had to leave home unexpectedly; he will not return for a day or so."

CHAPTER XXX.

LADY HORSHAM'S HARVEST.

It is probable that Berris would have left Edgerley and have gone to spend a few days with the Yarms without waiting for an invitation, but she felt perfectly convinced that her husband had gone away because he was too much ashamed of his own conduct to be able at once to face her. She therefore awaited his apology. She told herself next morning that he had been in a passion, and had said what he did not mean. Well, she had been angry, too; so she ought to make some allowance for him. When he had apologized she should give him to understand that this sort of treatment could not be borne, and must therefore not be repeated.

After breakfast she resolved to ride into Northminster. She should call on Clara Gledhow, and get news of Molly, who had not written to her very lately. She came down into the hall, looking very handsome in her stylish riding gear, and she saw Dr. Yarm driving up to the door.

She turned into the drawing-room, and he followed her unannounced.

"I bring you the good news myself," he said, as he gave his sister-in-law a hearty kiss. "Our dear Molly has a healthy boy, and is doing as well as even I can wish."

"I am very glad," Berris said. "I congratulate you; I will ride back with you and see her, poor dear!"

"Thank you, but I fancy for a few days I must keep her quiet. I will let you know as soon as I think she is fit to see visitors."

He chatted a few minutes longer, asked after Sir Joshua, and then he went away.

Berris looked longingly after him. There was a man, she thought, to whom she could have opened her heart and to whose advice she could have trusted herself; and then a quick revulsion came, and she saw that she might as well leave Edgerley at once as let this keen-witted man know that she had quarrelled with her husband. He would not believe her version, and he would think Sir Joshua had deserted because of her temper. Of course Molly had told him that she had a bad temper. Molly was just the sort of person to tell everything to her husband.

She did not ride into Northminster; she took a road that led into the open country. She began to think about Molly and her baby, and then she rejoiced that she was not likely to have a child; it would be horrible to have a child with a face like Sir Joshua's. "I should be tempted to strangle it," she said angrily.

The afternoon brought rain, and Berris roamed restlessly about the house. She wished now she had written to her husband to insist on his apology and to explain her wishes for their future life, but he had gone away without leaving any address; he had driven, she learned, to the railway station. The vast house, with no one but servants in it, felt to her like a prison. She wished she had insisted on going to Colston; she need not have seen Molly, and she should have had Dr. Yarm to talk to in the evening. She would have sent for the rector to come and dine with her, but she did not wish to publish her husband's absence to that spiteful Miss Pierrepont, for Berris knew she had only one friend at the rectory.

She went to bed an hour earlier than usual, tired of herself and of her surroundings.

A packet of letters came in with her breakfast, and she saw that one of them was addressed in Sir Joshua's half-formed, scrambly handwriting. She smiled with satisfaction, and pushing it on one side she left it till the last. There was a short note from Dr. Yarm, with a good account of Molly and of the baby; there were patterns from Lady Horsham's dressmaker in London for the dresses which Berris had ordered for her Easter festivities, and there were several bills. There was also a letter from Mrs. Vere, asking when she should have the pleasure of seeing her dear Berris.

"That was his first bit of tyranny," Berris said. "I let it pass because the poor woman can't help

being a bore, but he might have let me ask her here when I proposed it."

She opened her husband's letter, and she saw that it was longer than she had expected it would be. She looked perplexed as she read, and this expression deepened till her face seemed stupefied with wonder. Then her under lip drooped, and she began once more to read; she thought she had misunderstood its meaning. She laid it down with a groan. She sat still, her teeth so tightly set that her lovely lips lost all form and made a straight red line across her face, while her eyes, ominously dark, glowered like those of some wild animal. She sat for nearly an hour thinking—always thinking.

At last she struck her fist fiercely on the table.

"The hound!" she said sternly, "the low, mean hound! He has trapped me just as they trap a poor stag!" She rose from her chair and began to walk up and down the room. "Is there no way," she said in a low, passionate tone, "no way of punishing him, without losing the price for which I sold myself?"

She broke off. The strain by which she had controlled herself gave way under the bitterness of her mortification; she hid her face in her hands and burst into sobs and tears.

Her husband's letter was calmly worded. He said he had gone away for both their sakes, and he was sure that her good sense would approve the step he had taken. It had seemed to him only

fair to give her time to consider her position. He told her she was too young to judge of life at present, and that she ought to submit to be guided by her only natural protector instead of rebelling against what was intended for her good. He reminded her that he had only settled three hundred a year on her, as he had intended to supplement what seemed a small allowance by liberal presents.

"There is one point," he wrote, "that I wish you to know with as little delay as possible, namely, that should I die without issue—that is to say, unless you bear me a son—every stick I possess goes to my cousin Algernon Wace, with the exception of your three hundred a year and a few other legacies. I have the power, of course, to alter my will, and to dispose of my personal property as I please. I think a wife should be docile and obedient, and I have no doubt, my dear Berris, when you learn that I hold this to be a woman's simple duty toward her husband, you will adopt my views, and that in future we shall live in peace. I am willing to let bygones be bygones, and to begin life again as we did at first. I shall return home to-morrow.

"Your affectionate husband,

"JOSHUA HORSHAM."

He would arrive to-day, then, for the letter was written from London. Berris had only a few hours to decide in. What had she to decide—to live her present life or to be a beggar in compari-

son! In the midst of her disgust for Sir Joshua, she saw that he had judged her rightly. She knew that she had already decided; she must abide by the choice she had made when she accepted this man as her husband.

CHAPTER XXXI.

FIFTEEN YEARS AFTER.

A WARM afternoon in October. The spreading beech trees of the deeply wooded avenue had on them the shimmer of a golden pheasant's breast. There had been little wind for some weeks past. Even if there had been, the depth of the wood on either side kept this broad way through it sheltered; and the tints on the leaves had ripened to unusual loveliness, without having been thinned by any autumnal storm. They were grand old trees, planted so widely apart that their round, smooth-skinned branches had flung themselves boldly and freely across the intervening spaces, thus partly veiling an exquisite vista of glades, across which fitful gleams of sunshine fell on tangles of brake and briar in jewels of color; while here and there was a vision of an antlered head peering from a distance, and then, startled by the sound of approaching footsteps, bounding out of sight.

The footsteps were coming from where a gate at the farther end of this wild avenue led on to the far-stretching moor, across which a rugged,

jolting road led to a market town six miles away. The broad path gave more than one turn in the wood, and then settled into a steep descent which went on till it reached Bernshaw, as the house was called, half a mile farther on.

The owners of the footsteps were a tall man and woman. The man was no longer young, although it would have been difficult to say what age he was. His companion was evidently some years younger.

"Then I am to understand"—a look of contempt went with the words—"that you really object to my visits? I think I have a right to ask the reason of this."

Berris had been gazing into the wood. She turned at this question, and looked full at her companion. She was greatly altered. She had lost her soft, flower-like color, her complexion was darker, and she had become very thin; but the great change in her face was its look of abiding sadness. The scornful curl of her upper lip had changed into a droop at each corner, and there was a heaviness in her eyelids utterly unsuited to the bright, beautiful woman who had married Sir Joshua Horsham more than twenty years ago.

She looked sad, rather than angry, as she spoke.

"If I were you I would not ask questions. I so seldom speak to you, that you may be sure I should not have asked you to walk with me when I met you just now on the moor, if I was not in earnest in what I had to say."

"And if I think I am wanted here, and that I had better stay, what then?"

The sun fell full on her while she spoke, and he saw the lines that sorrow and thought had drawn across her fair forehead. Algernon Wace had not much feeling, but the sight touched him. He was shocked, too, to see how greatly Berris had aged since he last saw her.

"I do not think you are wanted," she said. "You can ask Sir Joshua's man, Thompson, and he will tell you that my husband has become far more irritable during your visit." She paused. Her companion stood listening in the hope of hearing some complaint of Sir Joshua, but Berris had schooled herself at last; or, rather, that sternest of schoolmasters, the discipline of daily endurance, had at last taught her to bridle her tongue and her temper. Years ago, when Sir Joshua was suddenly struck down by paralysis, they had gone abroad to some of the foreign health resorts. Mr. Wace had joined them, and Berris had welcomed his companionship. He travelled everywhere with them, and although she felt sure that he considered her an inferior, he treated her with studied politeness. It dawned upon her at last that this man was an enemy instead of a friend, and that he did his best to create discord between her and Sir Joshua. With her usual prompt decision, she went at once to her husband and asked him to send his cousin away. They had lived peaceably together since he had partly lost the use

of his right hand and arm. This had made him in many ways dependent on his wife's good offices. But he had lately become irritable and suspicious, and when she made this appeal against her cousin he looked at her with the cruel, malicious expression she so well remembered at Edgerley.

"Want to get rid of Algy, do you? He keeps too strict a watch on your ladyship, does he, in my absence? If you only knew it, he is your best friend. But for him you would have half a dozen idle fellows after you."

She could hardly keep in her anger, but she saw that by quarrelling with her husband she should weaken her own cause. She knew that Mr. Wace could not bring any real charge against her, and her quick wits told her that if she could only have her husband to herself her life might become far more endurable than it had been of late. In the months that followed she convinced herself that her suspicion was well founded, and she guessed that her influence over her husband must be greater than she had thought it was or Mr. Wace would not continue to prejudice his cousin against her. She had become desperate. More than once she had felt tempted to give up the struggle, go back to England, and leave Sir Joshua to Mr. Wace. But the self-restraint of these last years and the presence of her husband's suffering—for it was a hard punishment to a man of his active habits and self-pleasing nature to be comparatively powerless—had not been lost on Berris. It may be that her

enforced submission sprang at first from an ignoble source, but, God be thanked, there are few women who are wilfully hard to the sufferings of others; and with all his defects Sir Joshua's courage and unexpected patience had surprised and touched his wife. She had begun to hope that life might brighten for both of them, when Mr. Wace joined them in Germany; and she soon discovered the meaning of his constant attendance on her. It came to her as something too good to be true when one day her husband told her that his cousin had received a sudden summons to London. A post worth having had been offered him in India. Sir Joshua since then had tried, one after another, most of the chief health resorts of Europe, with only a partial success. He had become tired of travelling, and, much to his wife's satisfaction, he at last returned to England. He shrank from going back to Edgerley. All his old pursuits there were closed to him. He and his wife, therefore, spent some months after their arrival at Bath, while Bernshaw was being arranged to receive them; and during this interval Berris spent some of the happiest time she had enjoyed since her marriage. Dr. Yarm and Molly came to see her, and Sir Joshua seemed to interest himself in the progress of their sons at school. He had promised that he would send the eldest, Michael, to Oxford, when he left school. Berris made constant visits to Bernshaw, and she developed the talent she had always had for arrangement in the

decoration of the house. Sir Joshua's interest in her plans drew them gradually nearer together, and when at last he took possession of his new dwelling he expressed his satisfaction heartily, and thanked Berris for all the trouble she had taken. The new house was smaller than Edgerley, but that was its only fault. The surrounding country was beautiful, the air was dry and healthy, and the park was considered especially lovely, even in a county famed for beautiful places. Perhaps the strongest proof that Berris had softened was shown in a letter she wrote about this time to her sister:

"I think you will be better satisfied next time you come to us. You will like Bernshaw, and you will also like the new life that has begun here between us. I mean it to last, Molly."

A fortnight ago a letter had come announcing Mr. Wace's return on sick-leave, and he had soon followed his letter to Bernshaw.

Berris fancied that her husband had received his cousin coldly, but in the evening Mr. Wace was shut up with him in his study, and Berris soon noticed a change in her husband's manner. Mr. Wace had pointedly avoided any chance of being left alone with her. To-day she had watched and waited till she had succeeded in meeting him on the moor, so near the old avenue gate that he had not been able to avoid her.

Algernon Wace looked at her some time in silence before he answered.

"Doctors say, I believe, that irritability is sometimes a sign of returning health." He spoke sarcastically.

Berris called together all her motives for self-control. Poor soul! she had need of them just then, under the mocking smile of her companion.

"I ask you to leave us to ourselves," she said.

He looked amused at her earnest tone.

"My dear Lady Horsham, this is not your wedding journey; and I am at a loss to imagine any other in which my cousin would not be glad of my company. We will refer the matter to his decision, if you please. Remember," he said impressively, "that I knew your husband long before you did. I may therefore presume to understand his tastes."

Berris looked at him slowly, while her eyes travelled over his face and figure.

"If I were you," she said firmly, "I would be honest. You have not come only to see my husband; you have some purpose to serve in staying here, or you would feel yourself bound to go away when I tell you that your stay destroys my happiness."

He stared at her in surprise. His idea of Lady Horsham was that of a thoroughly deceitful woman, a woman who would prefer to creep to her ends by a secret, twisted way, rather than by a direct one. This frank appeal disconcerted him. While he paused for an answer Berris spoke again.

"I will leave you here," she said. "Think over what I have said. You have power both to injure and to help me. I leave you to choose which you will decide to do."

A little way on a narrow track opened on the right between the trees. Berris hurried forward, turned into it, and in a few minutes she had disappeared behind a growth of copse-wood.

She reached the house long before Mr. Wace did, and she went straight through the hall and upstairs to her husband's sitting-room. She had walked so fast that the color glowed on her cheeks, her eyes sparkled with eagerness. For the moment her husband stared at her in wonder. She looked as beautiful as ever.

"Joshua," she cried, before he could get out a word, "listen to me."

Ever since he came to Bernshaw Sir Joshua had been sensible of a change in his wife, but as yet he could hardly believe in its continuance; and then his cousin had come, and he had spoken to him about Berris, and had praised the arrangements she had made for his comfort. To which Mr. Wace had answered that he had thought his cousin too wise a man to be taken in by a woman. "She wants you to alter your will," he said.

Now, as her husband looked at Berris, the earnestness of her face struck him.

"What is the matter?" he said. "What has happened?"

She seated herself beside him. There was an

imploring look in her eyes as she fixed them on him.

"I want help," she said, "and only you can give it me."

He took her hand in his sound one, and she thought he looked agitated.

"Joshua, I have been trying to be a better wife to you, but you must help me. We shall not be happy if your cousin stays here, and he will not go away for my asking."

She felt so crushed, so humbled, by the fear that her appeal was hopeless, that she longed to be Molly. "Molly," she thought, "would have known how to be tenderly sweet and caressing;" and yet, though Berris longed to express her changed feelings, she felt awkward, even fearful, lest she should be suspected of trying to wheedle her husband.

He had been intently studying her face.

He said presently, in a quiet tone, "You asked him, did you?"

She bent her head.

"He told me plainly that you must decide it. He will be here directly," she added, in a sort of despair, for she felt conquered. She was not even angry with her husband. It seemed to her that his cousin's presence was the punishment laid on her for her mercenary marriage.

Her hand still lay in his. It trembled, and he pressed it warmly.

"My girl," he said, in an altered voice, "don't

you know that you can make me much happier than Wace can, if you try?" He looked kindly into her eyes. "Will you try?" he said gently.

She put her arms round his neck, and kissed him as she had never kissed him in all these fifteen years.

"Then we will both try," he said, "and Wace may go to the devil."

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